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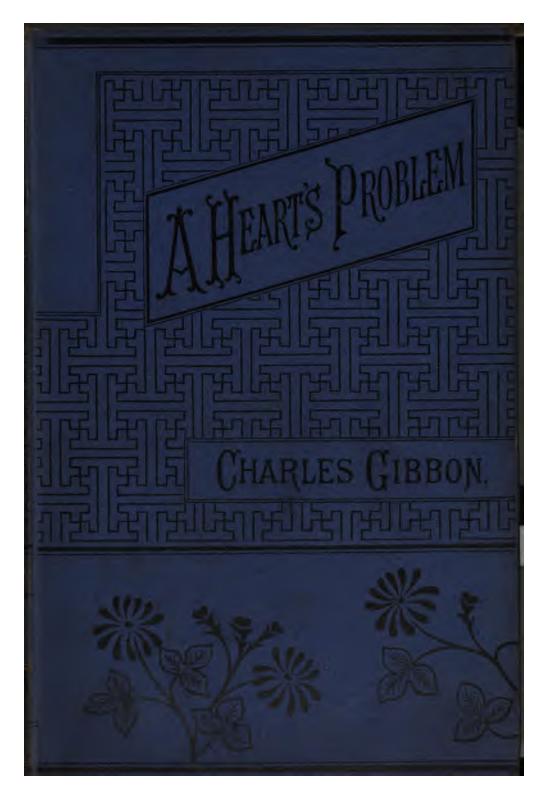
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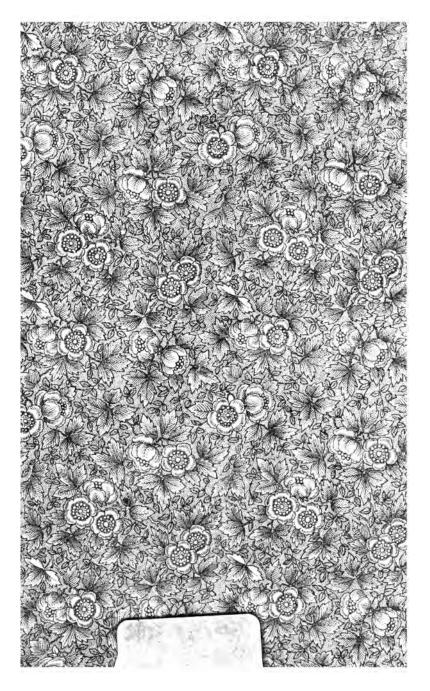
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## A HEART'S PROBLEM

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# A HEART'S PROBLEM

BY

### CHARLES GIBBON

AUTHOR OF 'ROBIN GRAY' 'IN HONOUR BOUND' 'QUEEN OF THE MEADOW' ETC.





IN TWO VOLUMES-VOL. I.

CHATTO & WINDUS, PICCADILLY
1881

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251, i. 725.

Let me not to the marriage of true minds
Admit impediments. Love is not love
Which alters when it alteration finds,
Or bends with the remover to remove:
O no! it is an ever-fixed mark
That looks on tempests and is never shaken:
It is the star to every wandering bark,
Whose worth's unknown, although his height be taken.
Love's not Time's fool, though rosy lips and cheeks
Within his bending sickle's compass come:
Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks,
But bears it out even to the edge of doom.
If this be error and upon me proved,

I never writ, nor no man ever loved.

SHAKESPEARE.

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The Author of

'The New Life'

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## A HEART'S PROBLEM

CHAPTER I.

A POOR YOUNG MAN



## CHAPTER I.

#### A POOR YOUNG MAN.

The small hours of the night in early spring are apt to be chilly to those ill-clad ones who are obliged to tramp from the centre of London to some suburban retreat. So Maurice Esmond discovered when he was making his way across Blackfriars Bridge southward. A keen east wind penetrated his closely buttoned coat, and he scarcely paused to glance at the long lines of golden shafts made by the reflection of the lamps in the river.

Although he had an eye for picturesque effects, he was evidently in too great a hurry at present to study them. As he marched on, the number of passengers whom he encountered rapidly diminished, and by the time he reached Camberwell Green the streets were almost deserted. There were, however, a number of cabmen, a few young men who had been out on pleasure, and others who were out from necessity gathered around a coffee-stall. A cheeryfaced old man, wearing an indescribable skull-cap, stood behind the counter dispensing cups of coffee, the heat of which amply compensated for any deficiency of flavour; and for the hungry there were huge sandwiches and hunches of currant-cake.

The group was a merry one, and Esmond

heard several loud bursts of laughter as he approached. It was a good-natured group too, and way was readily made for him as he advanced and asked for a cup of coffee. He drank it in silence, but was quietly observing his companions and listening all the time with some interest to their conversation, which was interspersed with anecdotes chiefly of a professional character, and as a rule much less coarse than might have been expected.

He laid down his cup and continued his way refreshed. Presently he turned into a narrow street which belonged to the older part of the parish. On either side were small shops—greengrocers, shoemakers, rag and bone merchants—and rising in their midst at short intervals the more com-

manding premises of the gin palace and the beerhouse.

At the side door of one of the little shops he stopped, and opened it quietly with a latch-key. The sign-board bore in large yellow letters the legend: 'Dan. O'Bryan, Tailor.'

Esmond was not surprised to observe that there was still a light in the back shop, for Mr. O'Bryan having, like most of his countrymen, a passion for politics, was frequently found at late hours seated on his tailor's platform, stitching some garment busily, and at the same time arranging the affairs of the nation in long harangues addressed to his son, who was his only workman, or to his wife, or in the absence of both to the walls, which in his imagina-

tion represented spell-bound multitudes of listeners.

- 'Busy still, Mr. O'Bryan?' said Esmond, as he looked in at the workshop door.
- 'Come in, come in, Mr. Esmond,' cried the old man cheerily. 'I'm delighted to see you before I go to bed. Sit down and tell us what has been done in the House. I suppose you heard the debate?'
- 'I was not in the House at all to-night; but I understand there was nothing particular done.'
- 'But something particular will have to be done, and that soon too; for although I haven't been in my country for many a year now—more's the pity—I know that the boys mean to have their own way this time.'
  - 'We will have our way,' exclaimed the

voice of the son, who had been sitting so quietly by the stove that Esmond had not at first observed him.

He was a very red-headed young man, with a good-natured face, on which he was continually endeavouring to display an expression of that melancholy which comes of too much brooding. In this he was not successful; nature claimed him for a 'low comedy part' in life, although, like many eminent actors, he was thoroughly convinced that tragedy was his forte. Even his name was against him; he had been christened Edward, but every one except himself seemed to have forgotten that fact, and he was known only as Teddy, and sometimes as Teddy O'Bryan. He could not help feeling, in the midst of some of his dreams of the future, that there was something ludicrous in the picture of a leader of patriots being hailed as 'Teddy, my boy.'

Esmond was accustomed to the eloquence of father and son, and foresaw that they were fully primed for hours of discussion. He therefore made his escape as speedily as possible, and ascended to the little front parlour which served him as sitting-room and bedroom.

- 'He's a queer boy that,' said O'Bryan.
- 'I don't like him,' muttered Teddy gloomily.
- 'Not like him!' said the father, looking up; 'what ails you at him? He is as dacent a boy as I ever came across; and when I said he was queer, I only meant that he bothers me by his being so quiet, and

never saying a word about where he came from.'

Teddy spat on the goose to test its heat, then polished it vigorously, and began to iron the collar of a coat.

'I don't like him: and it's because he's so quiet. You'd think butter wouldn't melt in his mouth, but I'm certain he's got some wicked purpose under his sleek ways. How do we know but he's a——'

Teddy paused, as if the thought were too terrible to utter, but he looked—or rather, tried to look—full of direful forebodings. His father rewarded him first with a loud guffaw, and then:—

'A spy, you'd say! I am thinking, Teddy, you're grown a bigger fool than you were born. I'll go bail for him, and I dare any man to say that I'm not true to the Cause.'

- 'You might get yourself into trouble then; for, as wise as you are, anybody can see that he is not one of us: anybody can see that he isn't used to being poor; and the mother knows that he isn't over-regular in paying his rent. She is as bad as yourself in regard to him, and says nothing.'
- 'But he always has paid some time or other, and handsome too; so now hold your tongue and finish that coat.'

Teddy proceeded with his work, mentally repeating, 'I don't like him.'

He had, however, a reason for his dislike which he had not yet explained to his parents; and that reason took the form of his foster-sister Lucy. This girl had been

Teddy's playmate and schoolmate, his companion as they advanced in years, and he had quite settled in his own mind that she was to be his companion through life. Never a doubt of the realisation of this plan had crossed his mind until Esmond had come to lodge in the first-floor front. had only seen Lucy and the new lodger exchange a few commonplaces as they passed each other on the staircase or met on Sundays at the simple family dinner-well spiced with thorough-going Home Rule politicswhich Esmond was invited to share; but the bosom of Teddy the Patriot was ablaze with jealousy.

There was certainly something a little mysterious in the ways of Mr. Esmond. The tailor's shop window had for some time

contained, amongst its usual indications of the business being carried on withinbuttons, patterns of cloth, coloured plates of the latest fashions, &c.—a card with the curt announcement, 'Furnished Apartments.' Esmond entered the shop, introduced himself to O'Bryan as having some connection with the press, and that fact rendered references unnecessary to the tailor-politician. The next day Esmond was His luggage established in his room. consisted of a portmanteau and a box of books, the latter being disproportionately heavy in comparison with the weight of the former. As it was a cold day in the beginning of January, Mrs. O'Bryan had a blazing fire in the room, which combined with the smile on her round good-natured

face to give him a hearty welcome. Esmond liked his landlady, and Mrs. O'Bryan's first announcement to her husband was to this effect:

'It's a fine young man he is, Dan; as quiet as a mouse, and as easy to deal with as a child.'

The kindly feelings which the good woman entertained for her lodger from the first day of his arrival soon made him feel perfectly at home; and before the end of a month he seemed to have known Mr. and Mrs. O'Bryan for years rather than weeks. His life was a lonely one, and the Sunday afternoons spent with the tailor's family formed very agreeable episodes in it. Although Teddy had early taken a dislike to him—or thought he had done so—he

only showed it by keeping a little apart from him, and by only speaking when he had an opportunity to flatly contradict any assertion made by him.

In the fourth member of the family he soon became much interested, and their acquaintanceship promised to ripen into friendship. Lucy was a hard-working girl; she was a dressmaker, and from Daddy—as she called O'Bryan—she had learned enough of tailoring to be of practical service to him whenever he was pressed by work. She was fond of reading, too, and this soon became known to Esmond.

There was a flush of pleasure on her face and such a bright look in her eyes when one day he placed a small parcel of new books on the table before her, that she appeared more beautiful in his eyes than she had ever done before. For the first time he became conscious of a degree of awkwardness in her presence; and that to a wise man, who did not want to fall in love, should have been a sufficiently apparent danger-signal.

'I thought you would like to see these, Miss Smith. I think there are one or two amongst them you will be pleased with.'

'I am sure I shall like them all,' she said gleefully, and beginning at once to examine the title-pages. 'Thank you, Mr. Esmond.'

He had never before thought that there was so much music in those two words 'thank you.'

'There'll be fine goings on now,' exclaimed Mrs. O'Bryan; 'ye'll have her

sitting up all night reading them books, an' going about like a ghost all day; an' maybe sewing the wrong sleeves into somebody's gownd, as she did once when she got hould of something they called "Penny-Dennis." Ye'll spoil her entirely, Mr. Esmond.'

'I hope not,' he answered, laughing at the distortion of the title of one of the works of his favourite author.

From that time Lucy was well supplied with books, and they afforded ample subjects of conversation. Books are mediums, and even dull ones may serve as tokens of tender thought. Esmond was soon conscious that Lucy had obtained an influence over him stronger than any woman had yet exercised. He was at first startled by this discovery; then, not having reached the

noon of love in the white glare of which the eyes and senses are blind and callous to everything save its own transcending brightness, he called a halt. He had no business to fall in love in his present position; hence he had no alternative but to leave the place. That was the plainest and shortest way out of the difficulty. He should go.

## CHAPTER II.

CALLED BACK



## CHAPTER II.

#### CALLED BACK.

'Come in,' said Esmond, in answer to a knock at his door.

Lucy entered, with a letter in one hand and a book in the other, and he rose from the table. The day was a foggy one, and it seemed to be twilight in his little room.

- 'I have brought you these, sir, and I hope I have not kept the book too long.'
- 'You have not kept it long enough,' he said, smiling, as he took the letter. 'I intended you to keep that book altogether,

knowing that it was a favourite of yours. Will you do so?'

She seemed to hesitate; and then, quietly:

'I shall be very pleased to have it, Mr. Esmond.' The answer was the natural one which a lady might have given to a friend in accepting any small gift.

'I am glad of that,' he said impulsively; and then checking himself, remembering his good resolutions, he began awkwardly to tap the fingers of his left hand with the letter which he had just received. 'I am glad because—because I shall probably be going away soon.'

'Going away! we shall all be sorry to miss you.'

The phrase was commonplace enough,

and there was no particular accent on any of the words, and yet there was a something in her tone and look which made him half regret his hasty announcement.

- 'I do not mean exactly that I am going to stay away: indeed, it is probable that I shall be back in a few weeks.'
- 'Oh, that is quite different,' she exclaimed, with a bright look as if relieved.

Then he, with a laugh which did not conceal the earnestness underlying it:

- 'Would Mrs. O'Bryan be very sorry if I never came back?'
  - 'I am sure of it.'
- 'And my friend O'Bryan—and Teddy—and you?'
- 'Yes, we should all be sorry,' was the response, with a little reserve this

time, and a slight tinge of colour in her cheeks.

'And I should be sorry to go, for you have made me feel as if I were one of the family. I could not easily find such a comfortable home and such good friends. Sometimes I think I should like to stay here always. How would you like that?'

'It would be very pleasant—we should all like it.' The latter part of the phrase qualified the warmth of the first.

That letter which Esmond had received was becoming somewhat crumpled by being continually bent and even twisted between his fingers.

'You would only find it pleasant in the same way as the others. Is that all?'

She seemed a little confused by this

question, and he made a blundering effort to relieve her.

- 'I mean that I should like you to say that you would miss our pleasant gossips about books.'
- 'I should indeed.'—She was interrupted by Mrs. O'Bryan calling from the foot of the staircase:
  - 'Lucy, here's some one for that gownd.'

Esmond did not know whether to bless or curse the interruption when he saw Lucy go away, her cheeks crimson as if with the consciousness that she had been about to say more than she wished to say at that moment.

They were skating on very thin ice, and this conversation had made them both aware of it. He stood looking at the door for an instant, as if he still saw her there. Then he turned to the window and looked out upon the fog, but the expression of dissatisfaction on his face was not caused by the weather. Presently he became conscious that he had not read the letter which Lucy had brought to him. Recognising the handwriting of the only friend who knew his address in Camberwell, he hastily opened the envelope.

## 'Fig-tree Court, Temple, Thursday.

'MY DEAR CALTHORPE,—The enclosed is, I suppose, from your governor, and I hasten to forward it. Hope he is going to make it up with you and set you on your feet again. Meanwhile, what has become of you, and when are you going to explain to me the

meaning of this masquerading under another name? Look me up as soon as you can. Very busy.

'Yours,

'H. ARKWOOD.'

The letter which was enclosed in this abrupt missive was addressed to Maurice E. Calthorpe, Esq., at the chambers of his friend in the Temple. It was from his father, and Maurice laid it on the table unopened, but his hand trembled a little as he did so, for it had recalled many bitter memories. There had been a quarrel between the father and son, and, as in most quarrels, there had been serious faults on both sides. Maurice had been called to the bar, and whilst waiting for briefs, which came too much like angels' visits, he had

been entirely dependent on his father. The allowance was not a large one, but Maurice was not extravagant in his habits, and he was able to maintain his position without any financial anxieties on his own account. He certainly did not inherit this frugal spirit from his father, who had been known in his early days as one of the most extravagant young men about town. The estate was soon mortgaged at heavy interest, but, although only a part of it was entailed, Calthorpe would not sell the land.

Maurice, an only child, had been brought up in the expectation of inheriting a considerable income. One morning he was suddenly told by his father that there was pressing need for a large sum of money, and that it could only be raised by breaking

the entail. To this proceeding the son positively refused to consent. Hence the quarrel and the separation.

Maurice forfeited his allowance, reduced his expenses to a minimum, and with a stout heart began the uphill struggle for fortune and position. Although he had not yet inspired many solicitors with sufficient faith in his forensic powers to induce them to overload him with briefs, he had gained some reputation as a writer on legal subjects. He had also contributed anonymously to the magazines miscellaneous sketches, essays, and verses, and to his pen he looked for the means to support himself whilst he waited for briefs; but he soon found that the productions which had provided an acceptable adjunct to his income proved a precarious

mainstay. In spite of all his economy, debts accumulated; and he soon became aware that they would go on accumulating if he did not make some radical change in his mode of His debtors became importunate, and only refrained from extreme proceedings because they knew that he would ultimately be able to pay everything with interest. became morbid by too frequently brooding over his present circumstances, and comparing them with the position which he ought to have occupied had his father's affairs been managed with ordinary dis-He did not complain of cretion. change in his affairs, however, and he tried not to think unkindly of his father; but whilst he continued to move amongst the friends and acquaintances of his palmy days,

he was constantly reminded of what might have been.

So one day he disappeared into the unknown regions of Camberwell, and there assuming his second baptismal name of Esmond (Thackeray's novel had always been one of his favourite books), he determined to work out his own way in life.

There had been no correspondence between him and his father since the day of his leaving Calthorpe, but he had learnt indirectly that the old gentleman was living a much more retired life than he had hitherto done. Maurice had been always expecting to be again pressed to break the entail, and he sometimes wavered in his determination to persist in his refusal when he thought of the old man's solitude and comparative

privation. Now came this letter, and he hesitated to open it. At length he broke the seal. The letter was written on the old-fashioned quarto page; the penmanship was small and angular, with many flourishes; and the lines were as close together as if postage had still been a consideration.

### 'Calthorpe, April 15.

'MY DEAR MAURICE,—Although we parted in a somewhat unpleasant manner, I still hoped that as soon as you had had time to cool, your better judgment would see the necessity and reasonableness of complying with my request, and that you would see it to be your duty to give me some indication that you regretted the haste of your conduct. That there was some temper on my side, too,

I should be the last person in the world to deny; but the positions are different. Apart from our close relationship (which in itself should entitle me to some consideration on your part), I am your senior in years and in experience of the world, and what petty ebullition of rage I gave way to should be attributed to the natural impatience which any man of a finely strung temperament would feel when so deliberately and obstinately opposed in the execution of what he believed to be his duty by the very person he most desired to benefit,

'Therefore I waited, expecting such a letter as your own good sense and filial sentiments might dictate. I need not say that no such letter has reached me; and it would be superfluous to add that I have

been grieved—very much grieved—by your silence. I hope still to receive from you some expression of regret. But let that pass.

'Do not be afraid, my dear Maurice, that this is a prelude to the repetition of my request that you should assist me out of a difficulty. No; thank Heaven! on this occasion, as on former occasions when brought face to face with stern necessity, I have found strength to meet it single-handed and to overcome it. You will be gratified to learn that I have succeeded in arranging everything satisfactorily.'

At this point there were several lines blotted out, and then in less distinct characters came the words, 'for the present.'

The letter continued:—

'It is on your account that I write, after waiting so long to hear from you. The feelings of a father have overcome me at length, and I am obliged to be the first to hold out the hand of friendship, although it would have pleased me much if you had been the first to do so. It would have shown me, for instance, that you regarded me as something more than a mere acquaint-ance, from whom you could separate yourself on account of a trifling misunderstanding. However, let that pass also.

'The serious object of my letter is to induce you to come here at once. I have heard from several quarters that you have got into deep waters, and that you are neither happy nor comfortable. This is most unfortunate, my dear boy, and distresses

me exceedingly. But I believe it is in my power to help you, if you are willing to help yourself by following my counsels. The matter will not wait, and I therefore beg of you not to lose a moment in communicating with me after you receive this. If you are in London, telegraph, and come by the first train you can catch. It is of vital importance that you should act promptly. I make no attempt to explain my project here, but wait anxiously for your arrival.

'Now let no foolish qualms or unnatural resentment stand in the way of your own good fortune, and of the happiness of

'Your ever affect' Father,

'HENRY CALTHORPE.'

Mr. Calthorpe apparently could not

afford space or time to write the word 'affectionate' in full.

Although not quite blind to the bombastic strain in which his father indulged, Maurice was too much ashamed of himself for the hesitation he had felt in opening the letter to think of anything but the fact that it asked him to forget the past. It was true he ought to have been the first to seek the reconciliation. He had been obstinate, he had been selfish, and his father had been generous. Thus blaming himself, a flood of kindly memories rushed upon him, and he resolved to obey the summons without delay. His offence assumed an exaggerated aspect in these reflections, and it became more culpable in his eyes when he read this postscript, which had almost escaped him:—

'P.S.—Do not forget that years do not creep, but fly with me now, and in the course of nature you cannot have the opportunity of spending many with me. You know how I dislike such disagreeable thoughts, and so you can understand how keenly I feel our estrangement when I have permitted myself to refer to them in writing.

'H. C.'

Genuine feeling was expressed there, however superficial might be the letter itself. Maurice hastily wrote a telegram to the effect that he would be at Calthorpe that evening, and rang for some one to take it to the post-office.

It was Lucy who answered the bell.

At sight of her his eagerness to depart

was suddenly checked, and the message which he was about to despatch assumed the form of a cloud rising between them. had not yet owned, even to himself, that he loved her; but at this moment he was conscious that one of the chief elements in his joy at the approaching reconciliation with his father lay in the thought that he would be able under his own name openly to woo and win her. At the same time there flashed upon him the question, would his father ever consent to the union of the last representative of the ancient family of Calthorpe of Calthorpe with the adopted daughter of a tailor?

The cloud rising between them became more distinct and more impenetrable.

Lucy observed the flush upon his usually

pale face; and although it was impossible to divine whether or not his expression was one of pleasure, she was glad to see him look so well.

Maurice impulsively threw aside that disturbing question which had arisen in his mind, and took her hand.

'Something has occurred which obliges me to leave here to-day; but it has made me happy, because it will enable me to return sooner than I expected. I should be anxious to return, if——'

He stopped. His movement and his speech had been so rapid, that Lucy had no time to think of how she should act or what she should say. The blood tingled in her cheeks, her pulse quickened, and something that was not pain seemed to rise in her

throat, stifling any exclamation of her bewilderment.

The awkwardness which had compelled him to pause was due to the sudden consciousness that an abrupt confession of his love might distress her. What right had he to imagine that she had ever thought of him with any feelings save those of friendship? And yet the confidence with which she allowed her hand to rest in his, the wondering, half-frightened, half-pleased expression in her eyes, gave him hope. Still, he would not venture to tell her all his thought.

- 'I was going to say, "anxious to return if all goes well with me." Then I shall have a surprise for you.'
- 'A pleasant one, I hope,' she answered, smiling.

- 'I hope so too,' he said, with a certain emphasis in his tone, and pressing her hand. 'It will depend upon you whether the surprise is a pleasant one or not.'
- 'Upon me, Mr. Esmond?' she said quietly, as she withdrew her hand.
- 'Yes; but you must wait till I come back to learn why. Now will you ask Teddy to take this telegram to the post office?'

He did not remember in his haste that any one looking at the telegraph form would learn his real name. He had simply doubled up the paper, with a shilling inside, and Lucy took it to Teddy, who, ready to obey her in anything, hastened to despatch the message.

It so happened that the clerk was doubtful about the orthography of the name, and

asked Teddy if it was Culthorpe or Calthorpe.

'It's not that at all; it's Esmond,' was the answer.

'There's no Esmond here,' said the clerk, handing him the paper.

Teddy was puzzled when he read the names; but the suspicions which he entertained about the occupant of the first-floor front enabled him to solve the difficulty to his own satisfaction. The man was an informer, or something as bad, and Esmond was not his real name. He read the message several times, in order to impress it, as well as the address, on his memory, and gave it back to the clerk.

'It's all right, sir: just send it as it is.'

When Teddy got into the street he halted for a minute, as if doubtful about the direction in which he should turn. If he had just run a long race uphill he could not have been more out of breath than he was now, with his breast heaving, and what wits he had utterly confused, whilst there seemed to be a couple of large Catherine-wheels before his eyes, scattering fiery sparks in all direc-All this was the effect of his momentous discovery. It was perfectly clear to him that his father, mother, and, bitterest of all, even Lucy, had been nursing a serpent which had crawled into their household in order to destroy them.

His first idea was to be off to the 'Boys,' tell them what he had discovered, and ask them to deal promptly with the enemy; but

how could he tell what might happen at home during his absence? May-be the minions of the tyrant government were already at the house, and its inmates being dragged in chains to a common gaol! Teddy's imagination had been so fired by the oratorical horrors in which some of his countrymen delighted, that he rushed wildly to the rescue of his parents and Lucy. As he approached the house, a cab drove off from the door, and there were his father and mother standing in the doorway, quietly nodding and smiling, as if bidding a cheery good-bye to some one. Behind them in the shop he could see Lucy, and all his wild visions of the ruined home, of the chains, and the gaol were dispelled.

'Hasn't there been any one here?' he

gasped, glancing alternately at his father and at the cab rapidly driving away.

- 'Yes,' answered O'Bryan blithely, 'there's an order for two suits of mournin', wanted in a hurry, of course.'
- 'But I mean anybody in particular,' whispered Teddy, with a comical attempt to be tragic and mysterious. 'I mean anybody from the tyrants—anybody set on by that ruffian we've been havin' in the house.'
- 'What's the matter with the boy?' ejaculated Mrs. O'Bryan. 'Sure it can't be Mr. Esmond he's meanin'?'

Teddy's notion of expressing dignified contempt was to fold his arms, to lift his chin high, and to look downward, as if he were studying the proportions of his nose, whilst he protruded his lips and spoke slowly.

'Mother, you don't understand these things, and so you'd better leave them to us. There has been no Mr. Esmond here; anyway, that wasn't his name. He's been deceivin' you all, and not any one of you would listen to me when I told you so; but I knew what I was sayin', and now I can prove it.'

All this dignity was, as usual, lost on O'Bryan, who only laughed at his son's grand airs.

- 'Then if Esmond isn't his name, what is it?'
- 'It's Maurice Calthorpe; and he's been writin' to another Calthorpe, and he's on his way to join him this minute.'

Lucy drew back farther into the shop when she heard this.

'It's ravin' again you are,' said O'Bryan, still laughing; but when he heard Teddy's story he muttered in a puzzled way, whilst he scratched his bald pate with his thimble, 'It's mighty queer.'

# CHAPTER III. FRIENDS AGAIN

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### CHAPTER III.

#### FRIENDS AGAIN.

In sunlight the little station of Dunthorpe looked very red and white, and so new that it appeared to be unfinished. Except on market days there was no bustle on the platform; only when a train was approaching were there any signs of active life about the place. Then a porter would calmly cross and recross the line with no apparent object; the station-master, with a slip of yellow paper in his hand, would take a placid survey of the rails; the booking-clerk would

leisurely open his wicket and (sometimes) issue half a dozen tickets. On a dark wet evening the station was dismal enough to make inward- and outward-bound passengers eager to get away from it. Heavy drops of rain falling from the eaves of the roofs plashed into tiny pools, which reflected the feeble lights of the lamps. Then a cold wind sweeping up the hollow completed the discomforts of the station.

So when Maurice jumped from the train he was pleased to find his father's man waiting for him with a pony phaeton.

- 'Glad to see you back, sir,' was the man's cheery salutation.
  - 'Thank you, Harris. How is my father?'
- 'Bright, sir, bright as ever; and younger nor ever.'

Dismal as the evening was, Maurice experienced a sense of exhilaration as he was driving along the familiar road towards his home. The hedgerows were like thick black walls, and clumps of trees formed opaque masses, showing curious outlines against the dull grey sky. He could distinguish the wayside cottages and farmsteads, which seemed like old friends repeating to him Harris's cheery welcome; and the gurgle of the river as they crossed the narrow bridge recalled pleasant memories of fishing and shooting exploits.

His buoyancy of spirit, however, gradually gave place to a sense of depression as he drew near the house, and in his mind's eye saw his father at last broken down and so lonely that he called upon his refractory son to come and comfort him in his declining days. He could not help thinking of him thus, in spite of the assurance Harris had given him, for he knew that his father was too proud to display any weakness to others.

This mood changed to wonder when, as the phaeton emerged from the dark avenue, Maurice felt his eyes dazzled by a blaze of light from the windows of Calthorpe House. The face of the building presented three gables, with a graceful drapery of ivy, through which in summer peeped white and yellow roses; and, surrounded by dense shrubberies and huge trees, it had a comfortable, old-fashioned, settled expression. At present it seemed to be laughing at the bleakness of the night, and hugging itself with the consciousness of a cosy interior.

- 'Has my father friends with him tonight?' inquired Maurice.
- 'Didn't you know, sir? I thought that was why you came home. A heap of company, sir; been making ready for them this fortnight or more. Some great soldier come back from the wars, and master is giving him a grand welcome.'
- 'Indeed! What is the gentleman's name?'
- 'Colonel Cuthbert—one of the Cuthberts of Hollyford; and they do say a stunnin soldier, that has won ever so many battles.'

Maurice was astounded by what he heard, and became puzzled almost to the degree of bewilderment by what he saw when he entered the house. There was nothing to suggest that it was the residence

of an impoverished gentleman. There were brightness, warmth, and an atmosphere of ease everywhere. The room, formerly his own, had been prepared for him, and a glad fire made the faded hangings of window and bedstead look as if they had renewed their youth.

The contrast between all this and the sad home which he had expected to enter caused Maurice to question whether or not he was dreaming.

'Mr. Calthorpe is dressing, sir,' said a servant, 'and bade me say that he would be glad to see you for a few minutes in his room.'

Maurice at once proceeded to his father's dressing-room, pleased to think that he would presently have a satisfactory ex-

planation of the enigma which perplexed him.

Mr. Henry Calthorpe was nearly seventy, tall, slender, and agile; face clean-shaven, head encirled by a wreath of white curls, hands delicate, and yet suggestive of some nervous force. He held both hands out to his son, and received him with an air of paternal friendliness and dignity.

Maurice had come to comfort and forgive; he felt as if he were being graciously pardoned and welcomed by a tender-hearted parent as a penitent prodigal.

'You have just come in time, Maurice,' said the father, with a pleasant smile on his sallow and almost wrinkleless face. 'I am sorry you did not receive my letter sooner, so that you might have come prepared for

this evening. Colonel Cuthbert is an excellent fellow, and I particularly wish you to show him attention. He is to be our neighbour, you know—or perhaps I ought to say your neighbour, remembering how old I am.'

There was such a droll mixture of self-complacency with an under-current of feeling that the present was an occasion on which some sentiment should be shown, that Maurice began to see the comic side of the position. And so:

'You seem well enough, sir, to be able to say "our neighbour." Time has dealt kindly with you, and I hope it will continue to do so for many years. Certainly your letter did not lead me to expect to find you——'

'To find me so well,' interrupted Mr.

Calthorpe, with a graceful movement of the hand, as if deprecating any further reference to his letter. 'You are not sorry, I hope, to discover that I can still enjoy myself in the old way.'

- 'On the contrary, I am delighted.'
- 'Glad to hear it; but it is only once in a while now, and the intervals between my enjoyments are long. There! we must have no unpleasant thoughts to-night, and none to-morrow either, if we can help it. Forget and forgive—that is to be our motto. Now go and get yourself ready, and remember it is important—most important for your own sake—that you should make a good impression upon everybody.
  - 'But I do not quite understand.'
  - 'There is no time to explain at present.

You shall learn everything as soon as our friends have gone. I promise you some surprise, and a good deal of pleasure, I hope. Now go, and join me in the drawing-room as quickly as you can.'

Although this brief interview had not given Maurice much information, he was relieved of the feeling of awkwardness with which he had looked forward to this visit, and was satisfied that by some means his father had got affairs into order again for a time at least. He was, therefore, in the mood to enjoy himself; and as the guests were with few exceptions old acquaintances, glad to see him, he was soon almost as happy in their midst as if there had been no dreary interval of banishment between this and their last meeting. His father had always been

notable as an excellent host, combining the tact of a woman in assorting the company with the genius of a diplomatist for making each guest display himself or herself to the best advantage. In his palmiest days he had never succeeded more thoroughly in entertaining his friends than on this occasion.

In the drawing-room and in the dining-room Maurice's wonder grew: since writing that letter which had brought him home, his father must have found Aladdin's lamp, he thought; and by-and-by he came to regard the guest of the evening, Colonel Cuthbert, as being intimately associated with the marvels he beheld.

The Colonel was a quiet-looking gentleman of average height and wiry frame. A large head, strongly marked, sun-tanned features, dark eyes, and bushy iron-grey hair, whiskers, and moustache, were the chief characteristics of the outer man. His thin straight lips were indicative of firmness, and his whole appearance was that of one who speaks little and does much. Although somewhat reserved in manner with new acquaintances, he was always courteous, and those who were admitted to his friendship soon discovered that his nature was singularly gentle and simple.

Long ago he had left his home, 'under a cloud,' the gossips said. There was a woman in the case, of course, and hints of painful events and family disagreements. The story had been almost forgotten, but his reappearance in the neighbourhood of the scenes of his youth refreshed the memories

of the gossips, and absurd versions of the cause of his long absence were speedily in circulation. The delicate veil of mystery which hung over his past rendered him an object of interest to the more sympathetic sex, and of some curiosity to the men.

Despite the difference of their years, Maurice and he immediately became friends. They talked much together during the evening; and before the Colonel took his leave it was arranged that Maurice should visit him on the following day at Hollyford.

When good-bye had been said to the last guest, Mr. Calthorpe took his son's arm and drew a long breath of relief, although his face was radiant with satisfaction.

'Thank Heaven that's over! Come along

with me to the library, where we can lay aside our company manners, and you can smoke. . . . You found Cuthbert agreeable, I hope?' he continued, as they crossed the hall.

'I do not remember ever having met anybody with whom I became so intimate in such a short time.'

'That is excellent; and you will like him better the more you know him. He is a capital fellow.'

This enthusiastic admiration of another man presented a phase of his father's character which Maurice could not remember ever having observed before. He had known him go into rhapsodies about a horse, but never about a man.

'He has certainly interested me very

much. I didn't know that you were old friends,' said Maurice, lighting his cigar.

'Oh yes, I knew him very well in my salad days,' replied Mr. Calthorpe, as he seated himself in an easy chair by the hearth. 'He was not so quiet then as he is now; he had a lot of "go" in him, as you would say, and we all thought he would do something remarkable.'

- 'And so he has, I understand.'
- 'True, but he would have done a great deal more if he had not made a fool of him self to begin with. However, that's his affair, and our own affairs are what we have to talk about to-night.'
- 'I confess that I am more interested in that subject, sir, than in Colonel Cuthbert VOL. I.

When I was coming here I was afraid that——

'That you would find me in a worse plight than when we parted. I dare say you think my lugubrious letter was all humbug—come, be quite frank with me.'

'I should not be frank with you,' began Maurice, after a brief struggle to find words which should convey his meaning with the least chance of being misinterpreted, 'if I did not confess that I began to think you had written to me when you were in a depressed state of mind.'

The father, with half-closed eyelids, scanned the pale, honest face of his son; then, coolly:

'Well, I suppose that was natural; I had an attack of gout at the time, and as one

gets on in years that sort of thing does affect the humour in which we speak or write. Probably our best course will be for both of us to thank the gout, since it has brought us together.'

- 'I am glad to be here,' was all Maurice said.
- 'Then, in the first place, let me try to put you at ease on one important subject. I have not the remotest design upon the entail.'
- 'I was not thinking of that,' was the hasty remark.
- 'Very likely not, but you would come to think of it soon if you were not assured that you might dismiss it from your mind. I wished you to be here'—the old man paused: there was no expression on his

smooth face, no faltering in the tone of his voice, but there was a slight quiver of the eyelids and a shortness of breathing which suggested that there was passing through his mind some deeper emotion than he cared to manifest. Then, deliberately: 'I wished you to be here, first, for your own sake; next, because I wish to see you fairly established in the world, and because I saw my way to help you effectively.'

'As you have put aside the one subject on which we might disagree, I shall be glad, sır, to follow your counsel as far as it is in my power to do so.'

'That is as much as to say, provided that everything which I have to suggest is agreeable to you, I may expect obedience,' said Mr. Calthorpe. 'I should have thought

that you would have shown something a little more like satisfaction in learning that I was able to help you than that implies. Stop!—you need not express any gratitude just now; there will be time enough for that by-and-by. I understand that you have not been very successful in your profession, so far?'

- 'If you were to say that I have not had any success at all, you would be correct,' answered Maurice, shrugging his shoulders.
- 'Ah, well, it takes a long time to make way at the bar; and you know that I never thought you had the necessary qualifications for the profession.'
- 'Yes; but when I decided upon entering it, I thought only of chamber practice.'

'It was like you to choose the branch which is slowest of all in growth. And pray, what sort of an income do you make by this newspaper writing in which Arkwood tells me you are engaged?'

'I manage to keep body and soul together, that is all—at present.'

'And in the future?'

At that question the man's eyes brightened for a moment, for he liked his work, and had had dreams of what he might do in literature; but he knew that his father was thinking entirely of the practical side of the question, and wished to know the value of his dreams in cash.

'The future would depend upon whether or not I had the special gifts necessary to distinguish myself as a journalist. In the meanwhile, however, it enables me to wait until I shall have found favour in the eyes of attorneys, and I am content.'

- 'Ah, my plan is a much better one than yours. You will no doubt think it is a commonplace one, but, at any rate, it is practicable, and will not only enable you to wait for clients, but to attract them. There is an *if* in it, however—*if* is very potent in everything we attempt.'
- 'I do not think the *if* can be insurmountable, since you say the plan is practicable.'
- 'Yes, it is quite so, but only if it does not interfere with any previous engagement you may have made.'
- Mr. Calthorpe pronounced these words so slowly, and kept his eyes fixed so steadily

on his son, that the latter felt his cheeks grow hot, and the image of Lucy was flitting before his eyes.

- 'You mean to suggest marriage,' he said brusquely.
- 'Exactly. It is the simplest way of overcoming the obstacles to your advancement. Do you dislike the project, or is there anything to render it impossible for you to enter upon it?'
- 'There is certainly nothing to render it impossible; but I have——'
  - 'Not got engaged, I hope?'
- 'No, but there is some one I like too well to care about marrying any one else.'
  - 'Is she rich?'
  - 'Very poor; but rich enough——'

- 'Yes, yes, I understand all that; but you said that you were not engaged?'
- 'I have not even told her of what I have been thinking.'

Mr. Calthorpe drew a long breath of relief, and smiled complacently.

'Then there is no difficulty whatever on that score; and as I am going to give you credit for some common sense, we can proceed to business. This is our position; all the mortgages on the property are now in the hands of one gentleman; he has increased the amount originally advanced to me on condition that, if I do not redeem the property at the end of three years, I shall surrender it to him entirely, on the payment of a further sum agreed upon. You see, the bargain is a very fair one. The money I

have now in hand will enable us to live for three years comfortably in the position which becomes the Calthorpes of Calthorpe. Within that period I expect you to marry a lady whose fortune will enable you to hold the estates unburdened. Otherwise all that will remain to you of Calthorpe will be the poor entailed corner.'

During this calm statement of the case Maurice was thinking of Lucy. He was perfectly aware of the advantages which his father was offering to him; and his relations with Lucy were still of such a nature that there was no probability of her suffering extreme misery if she should never see him again. But the very thought that she could lose him and not suffer stirred some spring of human perversity, and for the moment he

felt as if his life depended upon her. So there was a note of bitterness in his tone as he answered:

- 'I am afraid I do not think your plan quite so practicable as you do. But perhaps you have completed the scheme, and have found a lady who possesses the requisite wealth, and is willing to accept such a husband as I should be under the circumstances?'
- 'I have thought of the lady, and believe that you may win her; but you shall see that I am not going to wound either your self-respect or the respect which you ought to entertain for her. I do not mean to tell you who she is.'
- 'Not tell me who she is? Then how am I to know that when I am making my

lover-suit to order I am not blundering all the time?'

Mr. Calthorpe tapped the points of the fingers of each hand together, smiling as if amused by his son's humour, and inwardly chuckling at his own adroitness.

'I shall do my best to prevent the blunder; but if you make it, I shall not attempt to interfere. I only ask that you will give up this passing fancy of yours for this lady who is unknown to me; that you will take your place here, enjoying the society of my friends, maintaining your position as the heir of Calthorpe, and spending what time you please in the pursuit of your profession. With the one exception mentioned, I make no condition regarding your conduct. According to my view of

it, the arrangement is a very good one for you.'

Maurice threw away the end of his cigar, and made a hasty movement towards the door; but checking the impulse which the remembrance of Lucy inspired to leave the room in silence, he returned to the hearth.

'I do not know how to answer you. I wish to be frank, and I know that if I were to speak as I feel at this moment you would call me a fool. Enough for the present, then, that I fully appreciate your kindness, and have no desire to pretend to undervalue the benefits which you offer me; but this passing fancy, as you call it, has a stronger hold upon me than even I understood until you explained your wishes to me.'

Mr. Calthorpe rose, and quietly rested

his hand on his son's shoulder. There was a serious expression on his face, and he looked much older than he had done during the whole of the evening.

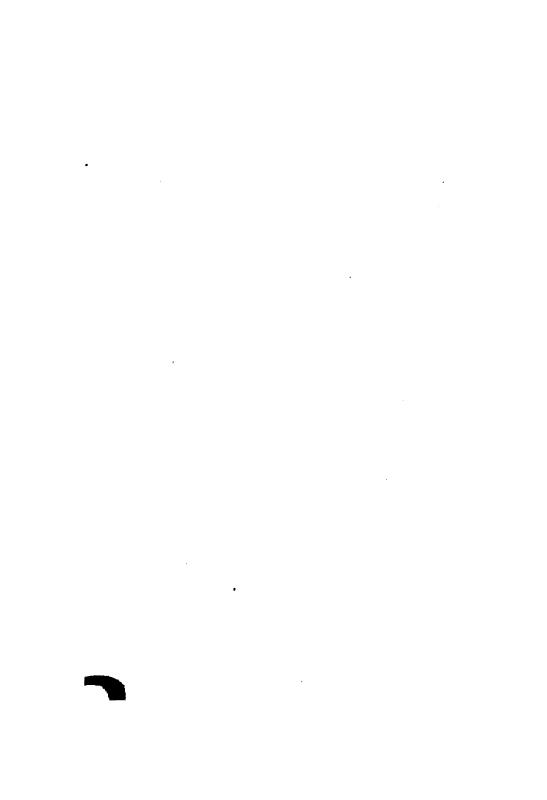
'My dear Maurice,' he said earnestly, 'most people think there is some good nature in me. You sometimes give me the impression that you think me too cynical and too selfish to be capable of understanding the emotions which are stirring in you just now. That is a mistake: I can understand them, and I like you all the better for them. I do not ask you to give me any answer either now or in the future; I make no condition whatever; I only ask you—to be my son.'

Maurice was for a moment bewildered: it was impossible to doubt the sincerity of

his father's craving for sympathy; and grasping the delicate hands spasmodically in his own, he said huskily:

'I shall do what I can to please you, father.'

He had not called him 'father' for a long time now; and in that moment the two men were drawn more closely together than they had ever been before.



## CHAPTER IV. IN A MIST



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EARLY on the following morning Maurice received a letter from Colonel Cuthbert, stating that important business called him to London, and that he must therefore postpone their meeting until his return a few days hence.

Maurice was not sorry to find that he should have the day almost entirely to himself. The conversation with his father had disturbed him much, and he was anxious to think out the whole position

alone. During the night he had come to the conclusion that, whatever he might try to do to satisfy his father, he could not give up Lucy. Then there had come to him brave resolutions to force the hand of fortune by sheer dogged work. Men had done it before under much more difficult circumstances, and surely he might do it too. There were other means of saving the estate besides the contemptible one of buying it back with a wife's portion. That he felt he could never do.

Vague schemes occupied his mind all the morning, but none of them took definite shape. He only knew that thinking of her he was strong and confident of success. He longed to have some token from her hand to show that she was thinking of him; but he

could not invent any excuse for writing to her without startling her by the deliberate declaration which he desired to make only when he was standing beside her. He was also anxious to let his father know the decision at which he had arrived, but delayed doing so in order that he might be able at the same time to lay before him some plan of action which might offer reasonable prospect of redeeming the property.

Mr. Calthorpe did not allude to the subject again: he took long walks and drives with his son, talking as if there never had been any breach between them, and discussing improvements of land and buildings with as much complacency as if his rent-roll were unencumbered.

At the end of a week Maurice proposed

to go to London for a few days. To this Mr. Calthorpe raised no objection, but asked him first to arrange certain matters about the drainage of the home farm. When that had been done, he discovered something else to detain Maurice; and so it went on for another week.

Colonel Cuthbert returned to Hollyford, and paid a hasty visit to his friends at Calthorpe. He had a private interview with Mr. Calthorpe, which apparently afforded that gentleman much pleasure. To Maurice the Colonel expressed his regret that he would not have the opportunity he had desired to cultivate his friendship, as he was leaving England on the following day, and would not return for at least a year. Without understanding why, Maurice felt as if he

had lost an intimate friend, and the only one to whom he could have given his entire confidence regarding the matters which most disturbed him at present.

That night he wrote to Lucy. It was a brief note, simply desiring that his room should be ready for him on the following Monday, and expressing a hope that everybody was quite well. A very cold and formallooking note it appeared; but the girl would have been sorry for him—or perhaps amused—if she had known how much it cost him to write in that apparently quiet manner. Every word was glowing with affection in his eyes; the simple name was like a star shining upon him as it was slowly formed under his pen; and to him the commonplace 'yours faithfully' had a meaning more

intense than all the terms of endearment which the dictionary contained.

'What a fool I am!' he muttered, smiling at himself as he tenderly closed the envelope, 'and how ridiculous she would think me if she could only read under the lines—would she?'

He even hesitated to post this missive of mighty import, but only for an instant: the desire to hold communication with her, however trifling, was now uncontrollable. He watched for the answer with painful eagerness and impatience.

Two days afterwards a box was brought from the station, addressed to 'Maurice Esmond Calthorpe, Esquire,' in a large sprawling hand, the 'Esquire' being written in very large characters, as if to give it special prominence. The box contained the books and other articles which he had left at his Camberwell lodgings. There was no letter in the box or accompanying it to explain how his address had been discovered, or why the things had been forwarded.

Was this the answer to his note? They had discovered his real name, and they were offended. The address had not been written by Lucy; the feeble attempt at satire in the enlargement of the title 'Esquire' was evidently the production of the patriot Teddy. If the latter had desired to keep Mr. Esmond away, he made a mistake.

On the following day Maurice drove up to the door of Dan O'Bryan's shop. The shutters were up, the door was locked, and a bill intimated that this convenient shop and house were to let. Maurice stood for a few moments looking in blank amazement at the tenantless dwelling: then he stepped into the greengrocer's next door, and sought information as to the whereabouts of the O'Bryans.

- 'They've gone away, sir,' answered a little stout woman with a florid, goodnatured face, as she weighed out a pound of potatoes for a ragged, unwashed girl, who was glaring at the new-comer.
  - 'When did they go?'
- 'About five days since,' said the woman; and then, looking at him with a shopkeeper's instinct, asked quickly, 'They ain't owing you anythink, are they? Oh, lor, of course not—I sees. You're the young man as had the first floor. I ought to have known that it

was all square, because they was decent people, and paid up everything hon'rable.'

'I have no doubt of that,' said Maurice hastily: 'but I am surprised that they should have gone away so suddenly. They had no thought of going when I saw them last, only three weeks ago. Did they leave any address?'

'No; they didn't say where they was goin' to, or what they was goin' to do. But Teddy—that was the son, you know, and always a queer chap he was—Teddy was lookin' mighty big, and talkin' about new gov'nors and new laws in a way that made one think he was fit for Bedlam. O'Bryan and his missus kept quiet, and I didn't see the girl Lucy—and a nice girl she was, sir, I says it—I didn't see her for I

dunno how long (here's your taters, my dear).'

'And did Teddy give you no hint at all about where they were going to? did he speak of Ireland?'

'Now you mention it, sir, he did speak about Ireland, and the rumpus that's goin' on there; and he spoke about Ameriky too.

My belief is that it's Ameriky they were goin' to, but that's only my guess.'

Maurice was unable to obtain further information; even the potman at the 'Kentish Drovers,' the tap-room of which was a favourite haunt of Teddy and his political conspirators, could tell him no more. He did not know any of the friends of the O'Bryans, and therefore his inquiries were brought to a dead stop when he had called

upon the neighbouring tradespeople. Knowing O'Bryan's enthusiasm for the cause of Ireland, and Teddy's wild notions as to the means of righting all her wrongs, he could quite believe that the old tailor and his family had gone to America on some Land League commission. He readily found an explanation of their silence to him in their discovery of the secret of his name.

He returned to Calthorpe. His father received him without any expression of surprise at his speedy reappearance, and in every way continued apparently to treat his comings and goings as ordinary matters of the day. He was, however, noting the changes in his son's mood with keen interest. He had seen the eager expression on his face when he started for London, correctly inter-

preted the gleam of hope that had been in his eyes when going, and half guessed the cause of the restlessness and depression which he displayed on his return. He was pleased to know that Maurice was in frequent communication with Arkwood, but he was mistaken in supposing that the subject of the correspondence was entirely legal.

Maurice had made Arkwood his confidant, and with his assistance had been endeavouring to trace the O'Bryans. He had endured some banter from his practical-minded friend as to the folly of thinking about love instead of law, but he had obtained the requisite assistance. The result was as futile as the inquiries he had made himself in Camberwell: he could learn nothing about Lucy. He still hoped that

one of the family would write to him—perhaps she would answer his letter. Even that hope was dispelled as time passed and no sign came from her. If he could only have learned that she wished to forget him, there would have been some satisfaction in proving his love by respecting the wish and ceasing his pursuit. There could be no prolonged hardship in doing that, he thought; for, to his mind, love was a free gift, and not to be won by pleading. That was the love he sought; and, whilst in doubt as to whether or not he had obtained it, he would still be haunted by the craving to find her.

In this humour he visited Arkwood, and that gentleman gave a prompt and decisive answer:

There is only one way out of it,

Calthorpe. Take chambers and get into harness. There is nothing like hard work for clearing the head of all the nonsense woman puts into it. Treat it like a cold, with plenty of mustard and hot water. Try my cure.'

Maurice did try it, without much success at first, beyond the satisfaction of knowing that he was gradually acquiring some respect amongst his friends in the Temple as a hard reader and an authority on precedents and decisions in the Rolls Court. Arkwood dubbed him 'The Temple Book of Reference,' and his growing reputation obtained recognition in the direction most agreeable to him. At the end of a year he discovered that he had received fees amounting to nearly two hundred guineas, and that there

had been days during which he had not thought of Lucy.

Her image came to him at intervals, but the face became more and more undefined as the mist of time thickened over it. Still, there were times when the glance of some passing face, or the sound of a soft low voice, would bring back to him all the old yearning to see her. How long ago it seemed to be since they had parted! Then he would wonder where she was, try to imagine what she might be doing at that moment, what she was like—something quite different from what he supposed, no doubt—and what would be their feelings towards each other if they were suddenly to meet. The memory was like that of a beautiful picture which one has seen in some out-of-the-way place long ago, and has no expectation of ever seeing again.

There was a quiet pleasure in dreaming about the bright face, and in trying to penetrate the mysteries of what might have happened had he found her after the reconciliation with his father. The thought of his father always recalled him from dreamland, and made him uneasily conscious of the lapse of time.

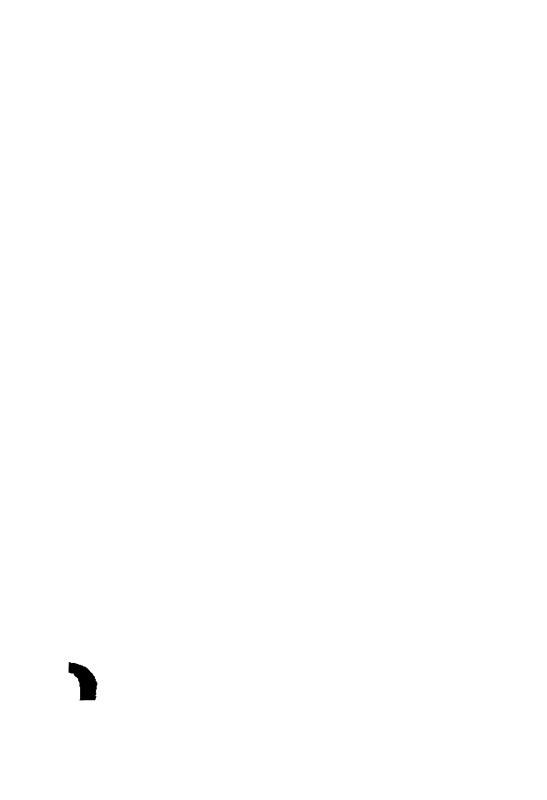
He had done very little so far towards the accomplishment of the object on which the old man's heart was set; and the two years still remaining in which to accumulate the means wherewith to release the property were ridiculously inadequate for the purpose, calculating by his present rate of progress. Yet he was assured that, all things considered, his practice was very fair, and most promising. His father's plan did not commend itself to him now any more than when first mooted, but he was compelled to admit that it was still the most feasible one apparent.

Mr. Calthorpe preserved silence on the subject. He saw that his son was favourably received in society, and believed that he might have paid his addresses to more than one woman of fortune with every prospect of acceptance. But he did not remind him by word or look of the day of reckoning which was drawing near, or of the means by which he expected it to be met: the means were to his mind the most convenient at command, and therefore the best. He found intense satisfaction in the belief that Maurice had given up the lady—whoever she might be—

to whom he had referred when the subject of marriage had been mentioned. Had that not been the case, Mr. Calthorpe was too confident of his own acumen to imagine that he would have failed to detect the signs of a continued correspondence. As it was, the growing interest evinced by Maurice in his profession afforded the best possible proof that there was no love affair distracting the barrister's mind.

So Mr. Calthorpe was content to allow matters to glide on in their own way, and was secretly proud of the skill with which he managed his son, as well as certain of ultimate triumph.

## CHAPTER V. THE DOPPEL-GÄNGER



## CHAPTER V.

## THE DOPPEL-GÄNGER.

A BRIGHT spring morning. The sunlight attracted a thick haze from the earth, and thrust it aside as soon as it rose, to form a bluish-cream background for the delicate pale green of the buds which gleamed on the hedgerows and the trees. The new vigour of the year inspired the toilers in the fields and by the waysides, and the sunlight made life glad.

Maurice felt light of heart as he walked at a brisk pace along the main avenue of the Earl's Park; and when overtaken by his father, who was driving, declined to take a seat in the phaeton.

- 'You had better join me,' said Mr. Calthorpe, 'or you will miss the opportunity of being amongst the first to show neighbourly respect to the people at Hollyford.'
  - 'What, has Cuthbert arrived?'
- 'Yes, two days sooner than he expected. They have been travelling everywhere during the last eighteen months, and now they mean to settle down.'
- 'They? Has he brought a wife with him, then?'
- 'Oh dear no; it is his daughter who is with him. I have never seen her, but the Colonel says she is everything he could desire his child to be—in which case she

must be a paragon, for you know how careful he is of praise as well as of blame.'

- 'You seem to have made up your mind to think her so, at any rate, sir.'
- 'Well, yes; I take his word for her goodness and beauty, and I know that she is an heiress—therefore I am ready to admire her,' answered Mr. Calthorpe frankly. 'I suppose you have no business of vital importance demanding your immediate attention, and so I do not see why you should deny Cuthbert the pleasure of seeing you—to say nothing of the pleasure to yourself of making the acquaintance of his daughter.'
- 'Very well,' was the laughing response,
  'I shall go to see—the Colonel.'

He knew that his father would not have been so desperately eager about his introduc-

tion to Miss Cuthbert if she had not been an only child and an heiress. Mr. Calthorpe smiled too, congratulating himself that he managed things admirably by openly acknowledging his interest in the Colonel's daughter. He was desirous that the young people should be brought together as early as possible under favourable conditions for each to make an agreeable impression on the other. There was no time like the present; she was fresh from foreign travel, probably her heart glowing with anticipations of the pleasures of her new home, and ready to like anything and anybody associated with it and with her father. Maurice was now apparently heart-free, and the strain he had lately put upon himself being relaxed, he would be susceptible to the charms of a

handsome and intelligent woman. Frequent opportunities of meeting—which could be easily arranged without any appearance of 'forcing'—would do the rest. The whole course was beautifully simple and clear to the strategical eyes of Mr. Calthorpe.

Maurice understood his father's calculations, and consequently the prospect of an introduction to Miss Cuthbert was not such a strong inducement to visit Hollyford as it ought to have been to him. But he wished to see the Colonel; and so he consoled himself with the reflection that he was not bound to become a wooer: and besides, a woman might be lovable although she was an heiress, and a woman might love him although he was poor. He feared, however, that no such happy combination of circum-

stances would ever fall to his lot. Indeed, his position rendered it almost impossible; for the mere fact that a lady possessed a fortune reminded him too painfully that his attentions might be misinterpreted, and roused something like an unconscious prejudice against her.

Hollyford House was a plain, substantial-looking building, which had been the residence of a sturdy race of yeomen from the days of James I. There had been additions to the fabric, but the original portion remained unaltered. It had a good title to its name in the numerous holly trees which lined the grounds, and in the ford near the entrance gate. The grounds had been greatly improved by the Colonel's predecessor—a misanthropical bachelor with a taste for land-

scape gardening—and presented many picturesque surprises of pathways leading through apparent wildernesses of untended shrubs and brushwood into carefully cultured flowergardens. Nature had assisted art marvellously, and the artist had wisely allowed nature to have the best of it; so that the grounds of Hollyford had obtained a whole page of immortality in the local guide-book.

The Colonel had seen his friends approaching, and was at the door to receive them—he had a liking for this old-fashioned act of courtesy. As he warmly shook hands with them, Maurice was struck by the change in his manner and appearance. The shadow of reserve which had been observable formerly was gone: the lines of his face seemed to be softened; there was the light of happi-

ness in his eyes, and the spring of youth in his movements. Contrasted with his former self, he was like a man who, after long walking in darkness, finds himself once more in clear daylight, and is inexpressibly joyous.

'Why, you have gone back a quarter of a century,' exclaimed Mr. Calthorpe, with a look of complimentary envy. 'Here is no staid leader of men, but the wild gallant, Frank, I knew—how long ago?'

'Upon my word, Calthorpe, I feel as if I had gone backwards,' answered the Colonel, smiling. 'I feel more youth in my veins now than I have felt for many a year. And I have good reason, as you shall both own when you come to know my daughter.'

'You have so roused my curiosity regarding her, that my only regret in the near

prospect of seeing her is that I am not a young fellow like Maurice there. Ah! those days are gone; but if she can only do half as much for me as she has done for you, I shall be grateful.'

'She will be pleased to see you, at any rate; for she regards you as an old friend—and I may say almost as much for your son. Your letters kept us so well informed about your doings, that she said only the other day that she seemed to know you both. Come along; she is in the library. I ought to tell you that she is very much inclined to be a blue-stocking, and it is hard work trying to keep her away from books.'

Maurice had been an interested listener to all this, and he had learned two things: first, that his father had been an unusually good correspondent; and next, that Miss Cuthbert was a young lady of a serious turn of mind. The latter discovery was satisfactory, as there might be friendship without flirtation.

On entering the library, Maurice at the first glance thought it was unoccupied, but in response to the announcement made by the Colonel, 'Here is Mr. Calthorpe, my dear, and here is his son,' a lady stepped towards them from behind a screen. She laid the book she had been reading on the table, and advancing to Mr. Calthorpe, told him simply how pleased she was to meet her father's old friend, of whom she had heard so much.

As Maurice was by inference included in this salutation, he ought to have said something in reply, but he only bowed, leaving all the talking to his father. There was, indeed, little necessity for him to speak, as Mr. Calthorpe, beginning with the usual commonplaces, continued the conversation as if subjects of mutual interest were inexhaustible, and the lady was apparently pleased to listen. The Colonel, observing this, gave his attention chiefly to Maurice, and in his own gaiety of heart did not observe the curious abstraction in the latter's manner.

Maurice had a shy way of looking at women when first introduced, and as Miss Cuthbert's back was towards the window, he might have gone away without being able to tell whether she was well or ill-favoured in looks, had not something in the tone of her voice struck his ear like a stray bar of some familiar melody which he could not at once

completely recall. As he glanced at her occasionally something in her figure, too, reminded him of some one he had known. The dreamy wonder which these vague memories at first inspired rapidly developed into an eager desire to identify the voice and figure with those of that some one he seemed to have known long ago. His memory would not serve him; but every time Miss Cuthbert spoke or moved he became more convinced of her resemblance to an old friend. By-and-by her face was turned to the window; the sunlight fell full upon it. Then he understood.

If by any power of magic it had been possible to transform the pretty sempstress of Camberwell into the beautiful heiress of Hollyford, then it was Lucy who stood before him!

For a moment, indeed, he was so impressed by the resemblance, that he had almost spoken the name. He smiled at his own folly as he said to the Colonel:

'If your daughter has thought of us as old friends, I have discovered in her the most extraordinary likeness to a young lady I knew some time ago.'

'Indeed! I hope that will make your acquaintance the more pleasant. I must tell her.—Are you aware, Mabel, that you have a Doppel-gänger wandering about the world, and young Mr. Calthorpe has seen her?'

Miss Cuthbert smiled, as if much amused and interested, her clear, soft eyes looking straight into those of Maurice.

'I have heard of people having doubles,

Mr. Calthorpe, and have been told that I enjoy the privilege of having another self. You must tell me about her: I am curious to know what sort of person she is.'

Miss Cuthbert with Lucy might have been before, it became intensely so now, and he laughed again at himself; but underneath the laugh there was a deep yearning for the absent one. She seemed to be standing before him, with added graces and beauty, and yet she was so far away! He had no difficulty now in distinguishing the two individualities; for whilst Miss Cuthbert seemed to be her exact counterpart, she had about her something that Lucy never could have had—the atmosphere of strangeness.

'The resemblance is so remarkable, Miss

Cuthbert, that I believe if my friend were beside you, and dressed in the same way, you would yourself fancy that you were looking in a mirror.'

- 'You almost frighten me. I hope she is an agreeable lady—but perhaps I am too hasty: does she live?'
- 'I believe so—I hope so,' he said, with more warmth than he intended to display; then quietly: 'but unfortunately I have not seen her for a long time.'
- 'Nor heard about her?' queried Miss Cuthbert with increasing interest.
- 'Nor heard of her.' His voice was low, and there was a dreamy look in his eyes; he was gazing at Miss Cuthbert and speaking to her, but it was Lucy he saw. 'She belonged to a somewhat droll family; they suddenly

left the place in which they lived when I knew them, and I have never obtained any clue to their whereabouts.'

- 'I suppose you were not so deeply interested as to make particular inquiries about the fate of my double?—I warned you that I was curious.'
- 'Oh, he knew the lady only for a very short time,' broke in Mr. Calthorpe senior. He thought the conversation was trenching on dangerous ground, and was eager to interrupt it. 'And he has been too busy to think much about the friends he refers to. You see, Miss Cuthbert, when we are out in the world we frequently meet people whom we should like to retain as friends, lose sight of them, and forget all about them until some slight incident or trifling resem-

blance reminds us that such people have existed. It is a very common experience.'

'Of course, people must learn to forget,' said Miss Cuthbert gaily, adding with mock horror: 'What a dreadful state of mind we should be in if we remembered everybody!'

At this there was one of those laughs which serve to fill up a gap in conversation if nothing else. Then Mr. Calthorpe, believing that he had effectually diverted Miss Cuthbert's thoughts from the subject of Maurice's lost friend, whose memory had so inopportunely obtruded itself, resolved to take a bolder step than he had meditated doing at this first interview. He suggested to the Colonel that they should leave the young people to entertain each other whilst they settled some business matters.

- 'You are fond of books, I understand,' said Maurice, when they were left alone.
- 'I cannot pretend to be much of a reader,' was the answer, with an air of indifference. 'To tell the truth, I like those books best which send me to sleep soonest.'
  - 'Have you no favourite authors?'
- 'I cannot say that I have. I like a novel sometimes, but I cannot bear poetry or history, or any of those learned things that ladies are making such a fuss about just now, except in the way I have told you.'

Maurice was for a moment doubtful whether or not she was serious, and she laughed at his surprise as she went on:

'I am afraid you will think I have very bad taste, Mr. Calthorpe; but you know we cannot all be bookworms. I like an active life—parties, dances, theatres, and any place where I can meet amusing people. And since I am making my confession, let me shock you still further—young as I am, I have learned to like a good dinner.'

- 'You are surely laughing at me, Miss Cuthbert,' said Maurice, more and more perplexed that one so like Lucy in person should be so unlike her in mind.
- 'Why should you think so? From your father's letters I know your tastes, and might easily have won your good opinion by pretending to care for things which are indifferent to me. But as my father has talked so much about you and Mr. Calthorpe that I know we shall meet frequently, I prefer to let you know at once what a very ordinary person I am.'

Maurice found the position extremely awkward; under ordinary circumstances, he could easily have turned the conversation with one of the stock compliments which are at everybody's command. But he could not do this with her; for be she as frivolous as she represented herself, and as indifferent to all intellectual pleasures as she pretended to be, there was still to him the halo of Lucy's memory surrounding her. That alone lifted her above ordinary women. There was evidently, too, a playful exaggeration in the account she gave of herself, which left him free to imagine anything he pleased about her.

Before they parted that day he had forgotten that she was an heiress.

Miss Cuthbert went to her own room. In a very deliberate way she placed her desk on a little table in the window recess, and seated herself before it. The window overlooked the most beautiful part of the grounds, and beyond was a long stretch of undulating country, like a huge map; hedgerows, trees, and at long intervals houses, forming the lines and landmarks.

There was a curious expression on the girl's face as she gazed vacantly over the green meadows: it was one of sadness, which although subdued was still poignant enough to stir the heart with bitterness. Then there came a slight smile of pity, suggesting that all her suffering was vicarious. She took a pen and wrote:

- 'My POOR LUCY,—You are not indeed forgotten, but you are remembered only as one of those whose acquaintance was very pleasant whilst it lasted, very nice to think about when accidentally recalled to mind, and nothing more.
- 'I have met the man; and if he is not already my lover, he is ready to become so on the slightest encouragement from me.
- 'You will say that this is cruel to you, as well as vain and presumptuous on my part. I wish to be cruel! and I am neither vain nor presumptuous in what I say. You have concealed nothing from me; I believe that you have laid bare your heart to me, and that I know its secrets as well as I know my own. I wish to be cruel, because I wish to teach you, if not to forget him, at least to

cease to love him. How can I do that better than by proving to you how greatly you misunderstood the nature of his thoughts about you, and by showing you how foolish you were in giving to him such a love as I know yours to be?

'I own that he is good-looking, that he interests me, and that if I had not known your story he might have attracted more regard from me than any one else I have yet met. But in my eyes everything likeable about him is destroyed by the reflection that, although he might speak readily enough to me, he discreetly controlled his tongue to you whilst making you believe he loved you. I do not blame you so much now as I did at one time for the mistake you made; but I shall never be able to tell you in words

strong enough to convey my feeling of indignation at your folly in persisting in caring for him. Did he not come to you under a false name? Did he not in every way appear to think of you as his equal? Did he ever by word or look give you any warning that you should not love him? Did he not in everything except in absolute words give you reason to believe that he was coming back to openly declare his love?

'He deceived you. . . . Perhaps he deceived himself, and mistook a passing fancy for what you unhappily believed it to be. Perhaps I blame him too much, but I am writing just after our first meeting, and cannot help myself, thinking of you. . . . I shall write more by-and-by.

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'I am quiet now, and can write with more ease. That does not mean that I intend to measure my words or deliberate upon them. I would like to set them down just as they come to me, let them be ever so unkind or wicked.

'It was well that I was prepared to meet him, for the sight of one who was—I am afraid to think that it would be right to say is—so dear to you, tried me very much. But I did control myself and conceal my knowledge of the past. Of course he discovered my resemblance to you, and spoke of it. Had he seen me a few months ago, he would have discovered a still closer likeness; he might even have thought that I was the Lucy Smith he had known in Camberwell. But I have changed much

even within the last few weeks. My father tells me that the colour is beginning to return to my face, and that he thinks I am getting stout! But the change which I notice most myself is a kind of hard feeling which I cannot quite understand; it makes me ready to be cruel, and especially to you. I feel that I want to hurt somebody. Except my father, I care for no one.

'I suppose it was this feeling which enabled me to be so cool when Mr. Esmond Calthorpe spoke to me; my self-possession blinded him completely. He had not the slightest idea that I knew anything regarding you, or what had passed between you. We talked about you—I, quite gaily; and he, just as anybody else would who was amused at the curiosity I showed in questioning him

about his friend. I must own that sometimes there seemed to be a grave look in his eyes, and although they were staring straight at me, he did not seem to see me, but somebody through me. Twice this gave me a most uneasy sensation; but a slight laugh or a dull joke was enough to clear away that strange expression.

'Having found me your counterpart outwardly, he wanted to make out how far I resembled you in other ways. He asked me about books, and all the things he knew you were fond of; and I saw that he was shocked to find that our tastes were quite different. If I had humoured him in this respect, as I might easily have done, I do believe he never would have given another thought to you. Vanity, vanity, you will

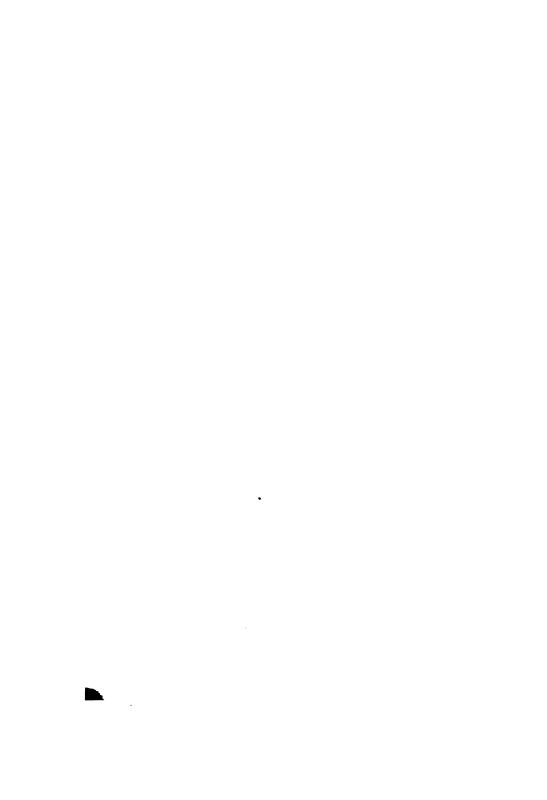
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say, but I do not think it is. I shall know better when he comes again, and I know that he will come soon. He said that he wished to become my friend, and he was in earnest. Indeed, I cannot help owning that I liked the honest way in which he said this, without making any apologies for expressing such a wish when he had only seen me once. He will come soon.

'I thought I was quite calm, but I am still agitated. I do not know what is the matter with me, except that I am angry with you. Perhaps it may soothe you a little if I tell you that on reflection I think there was an excess of harshness in the way in which I spoke of him when I began to write. It is possible that I have not made allowance enough for him. There may be something

in his position which would explain all his neglect of you.

'Do not think that I am changing my mind. I may learn to pardon him, but I can never forgive him. That hard cruel feeling is very strong within me when I think of him.'



# CHAPTER VI. PHANTASIES



## CHAPTER VI.

#### PHANTASIES.

Mr. Arkwood allowed his cigar to go out. That was a remarkable circumstance, for he had a special respect for his cigar—it might almost be called a species of reverence; and when he sat down to smoke one he gave it his whole attention. He fondled it, as it were, between his fingers, watched that it burnt evenly, admired the graceful wreaths of the smoke as they ascended, dreamily inhaled its perfume, and allowed the flavour, to linger in his mouth with the same relish as that experienced by an Epicurean wine-

bibber in sipping his favourite vintage. The cause of his present phenomenal conduct was partly the contents of a sheet of blue foolscap which he held in his hand, and partly something relating to his companion who was seated opposite, apparently quite unconscious of having any share in disturbing his equanimity.

The scene was Arkwood's chambers in Fig-tree Court; time, afternoon; a substantial lunch over, and Arkwood and Maurice had settled down to give their digestion fair play.

'What in the name of heaven is this rubbish you have given me?' inquired Arkwood at length. 'I asked you for the precedents you were to find for me in the case of Howler and Growler, and you give

me a paper on which the result of your researches appears to begin with the recondite question, "Is there any truth in Psychic Force?" And that is followed by the equally abstruse conundrum: "Can the same form exist vivified by a totally different soul?" This is not the first of April, Calthorpe, and I don't see why you should play a joke on me just now.'

Maurice flushed, looked very much put out, and made a feeble effort to put the matter aside with a laugh.

'An accident, Arkwood: that is a scrap of paper I was scribbling upon last night when I was mooning, and in my hurry when coming away this morning it must have got mixed up with your papers. Queer that it should be the first you took out.'

- 'Very,' was the dry response, thrusting the papers away and lighting another cigar. 'I wonder what would have happened to you if this had fallen into the hands of some decent, steady-going attorney.'
- 'Ruin, absolute ruin. I might then indeed have said farewell to law and the prospective woolsack.'

Arkwood was apparently resolved not to have his attention distracted from his second cigar; but although he nursed it tenderly, it was evident that another subject had forced itself upon his thoughts, and was making a good fight for the entire control of them. He remained silent for a little while, Maurice smoking fast and swinging one foot carelessly, as if to show that the subject of Psychic Force and the possibility of other

people's souls existing in other people's bodies had quite passed from his mind. At length, Arkwood, slowly:

- 'I had no intention of looking at the papers when I opened the packet just now. I only wanted to see if there was much for me to read. By the way, that is one of your failings, old fellow: you go in for too much detail. When this sheet came out, good boy, thought I, he has made a précis for me, and it was rather startling to have such things as that flung in one's face.'
- 'Never mind it. You will find the rest all right!'
- 'I would not mind it, but laugh at the accident, and thank your stars that I was the only one who knew what an unmitigated fool you can be when you get into one of

your mooning fits, as you call them, But you have bothered me a good deal lately, and this sets me thinking.'

- 'Nothing very dreadful, I hope' (still affecting to treat the matter lightly).
- 'I don't know. Some people may think softening of the brain of no consequence, as it is such a common malady nowadays; but it's an awkward affair for a professional man, if people happen to find it out.'
- 'It is not so bad as that yet!' exclaimed Maurice, with a real laugh this time at Arkwood's serious manner.
- 'Well, you have been forcibly reminding me of the days when you were in such an unreasonable state about the girl you met in your Camberwell lodgings. In fact, you have been displaying all the marked

symptoms of love-sickness in an exaggerated degree—you have a capacity for taking that thing very bad. I wonder why there is no compulsory vaccination act for the troublesome disease.'

- 'Because it is unnecessary, I suppose. I don't believe even you escaped calf-love.'
- 'Possibly not; but you must have done so, and that accounts for the severity with which the cow-love attacks you. Come, make a clean breast of it: have you caught it again?'
  - 'No, not exactly.'
- 'That means desperately bad. There is so much of the hermit-crab style of gymnastics in this love business, that I have no doubt Miss Smith having jumped out of

the shell your heart, some one else has jumped into it.'

'No, no other form has taken her place.'

Maurice rose, walked to the window, and looked through the dust-stained glass into the dull grey court, where the busy figures below seemed to his dreamy eyes like ghosts in a hurry.

- 'What then? You may as well speak out, for I know that there is something in the wind. I helped you before, and may do it again with my sage counsel or scathing chaff as the case may demand.'
- 'I wish I could tell you, Arkwood, but I cannot realise the thing myself.'
- 'Have a shy at putting the case plainly to me, then, and maybe in the effort you will get at it yourself. I have often known

a man who did not understand his case until he began to plead. Go on.'

After a pause, and without looking round, Maurice:

- 'You know Miss Cuthbert?'
- 'Perfectly—that is to say, as perfectly as any man can expect to know a young lady of our day. The study is rarely an abstruse one. Let me see. I have taken her down to dinner several times, walked with her twice and waltzed with her once—opportunity enough to enable any man of average intelligence to understand any woman of ordinary mould. Sum total: she is very handsome, rather clever, cursed with a vulgar hankering after people with handles to their names, and decidedly fast. I don't think much of her; but if she is the new

goddess—well, she is a good bargain as girls go.'

- 'You do not understand her at all,' muttered Maurice, with an impatient twitch of the shoulders.
- 'And of course you do. That's a comfort, and I should like to have a sketch of her from your point of view, if she is the cause of your present disturbance.'
- 'There is no chance of my being able to tell you anything if you continue this banter. And yet I can scarcely ask you to be serious, for I know that the affair is so insane that, were it told to me about some one else, I too should chaff, or become alarmed for the health of my friend's wits. There! we had better say nothing more about it. Pass the claret. Are you engaged this evening?'

- 'No, nor this afternoon: why?'
- 'I was going to propose that we should go to the theatre, or somewhere.'
- 'We can arrange about that by-and-by,' said Arkwood quietly, rolling his cigar between his fingers. 'Meanwhile, we are to have this talk out, and you are to let me into the secret of your lunacy. You know that I can be serious when I know that you are in earnest, although I may consider your earnestness so much good nervous energy expended in a wrong direction.'
- 'Upon my word I believe it is,' exclaimed Maurice, with the air and tone of a man who is sorry for somebody he despairs of rescuing from an impending fate. 'But the whole thing is so real to me, and yet so vague, that it utterly bewilders me.'

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- 'Begin at the beginning; imagine yourself pleading for a client, and, never fear, you will come out of it clear enough.'
- 'It begins with Miss Cuthbert, then. What you have said of her is correct so far as regards one side of her character, and it is the side which she appears to think the best to show me. At times she does say and do things which I should consider fast if they were not said and done by her.'
- 'The eyes of a lover, you know, are famous for seeing beauty even in defects.'
- 'But there is the droll part of it—I am not her lover.'
- 'You have been a good deal at Hollyford during the last three months,' said Arkwood significantly.
- 'Yes, and am likely to be there as often during the next three months.'

- 'Which plainly shows that you care nothing at all about Miss Cuthbert.'
- 'You are bantering again. I am serious. I do care for her, but not in the way you think. We are friends, and there is no thought on either side of our becoming anything more. Yet I long to be in her presence as ardently as any lover could. Her voice is pleasing to me even when she is uttering the most ordinary phrases; her face and form are in my eyes perfection, and every gesture is full of grace.'
- 'Bravo! A most friendly description of a lady by an ardent young gentleman who is not her lover. I should be inclined to say that my first opinion is correct—you are desperately smitten.'
  - 'No, for whilst I am looking at her, it is

not her I see; whilst I am listening to her, it is not her voice I hear. Form and voice belong to another; only the thoughts belong to her, and I do not heed them.'

- 'You puzzle me; and if it were not for your manner, I should fancy that you were joking. How can you have such a strong liking for her without regarding her with much deeper feelings than those of friendship?'
- 'I knew you would take the usual view of the case. She is handsome and an heiress. I am poor, but eligible in some respects, and therefore want to marry her. I tell you no such thought has ever entered my mind. My feelings for her are those of a poor man who falls in love with a painting which he never dreams of possessing.

Why I crave to be near her is because she is the living portrait of one who still holds my heart.'

- 'Do you mean Lucy Smith?'
- 'Yes; all the time I am with Miss Cuthbert it is Lucy I am thinking about; it is Lucy's hand which seems to touch mine; and that alone gives her the power of fascination she possesses over me, and at the same time banishes every thought of any other relationship than that of a friend.'
- 'It seems to me that you are playing thepart of a sort of modern Pygmalion, only you have found your Galatea ready-made of good flesh and bone, and I do not see how you can avoid transferring your affections from the absent one to her very substantial present shadow.'

- 'The two are very distinct in my own mind when I am not beside Miss Cuthbert; but when I am beside her I can only distinguish Lucy, and yet I am somehow aware who it is I am addressing, so as to observe the necessary formalities. Can you solve the problem?'
- 'No, it is much too hard a nut for me to crack,' said Arkwood, smiling quietly; 'and I see it is not a case in which you require my assistance. You will find the answer yourself by marrying her some day.'
  - 'Impossible,' was the decisive response.
- 'Nothing of the kind. You cannot go on loving a shadow in such a very pretty and substantial form as Miss Cuthbert—more especially if she happens to think about you at all.'

- 'There is no danger of that,' said Maurice, shrugging his shoulders; 'for I have never felt myself so awkward in anyone's presence as in hers, and I know what a very poor figure I must cut in her eyes under such circumstances. But I do not wish to be otherwise.'
- 'Ex-act-ly;' and Mr. Arkwood emphasised each syllable, looking at Maurice the while with a curious twinkle in his eyes. 'You do not wish it to be otherwise, and yet you have thought about it, or else you could not know that you did not wish it. The symptoms are very marked indeed.'
- 'You are mistaken, Arkwood; I am not deceiving myself in this matter, and when I become aware of any change in my feelings I shall certainly cease to visit Hollyford.'

- 'And what might she think of that?
- 'She!—It never occurred to me that she would think about it at all. Probably she would be glad enough to have seen the last of a tiresome visitor.'
- 'But she does not think you tiresome; in fact, she is rather interested in you, and I know it, for she told me so herself.'
- 'The interest can be nothing more than that which she might take in anyone who was intimate with her father.'
- 'Something more than that, I am certain. Understand, I don't say she's in love with you; only that she is interested in you. She knew that you and I were a good deal together, and before I suspected that she had any special place in your thoughts the fact that she took every opportunity of question-

ing me about you set me a-thinking. did it very cleverly, and without the least shade of mere inquisitiveness. Any one who had a kindly regard for you might have asked the same questions, and would have received the same answers; but any one would not have so persistently turned the conversation upon the same subject. I am not ambitious to shine as a talker, especially with women, but I cannot say that I felt flattered when I discovered that the only way to obtain her attention was to talk about you. My word for it, you have only to go in and conquer. There! I did not mean to say this to you, but nonsense begets nonsense, and so you have made me.commit what might be almost called a breach of confidence. On my soul, you look so gloomy

just now, that I wonder such a bright clearsighted creature as she is, would bother her head for a moment about such a morbid slow-witted fellow as you are.'

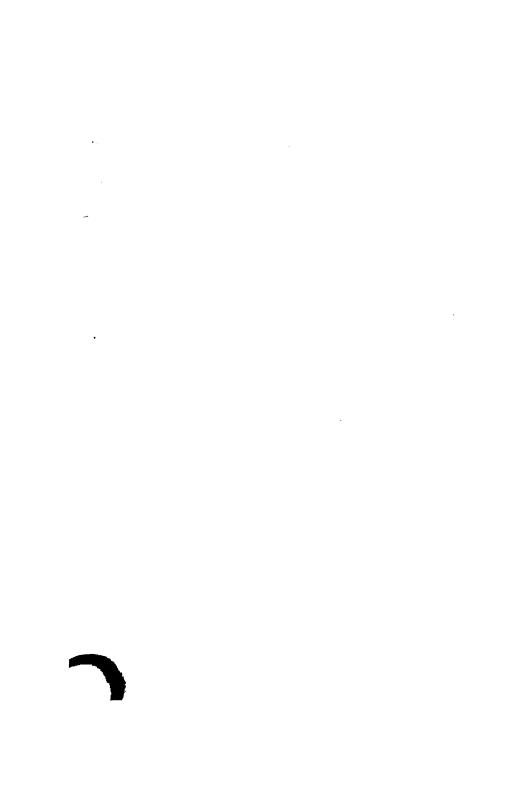
Maurice got up and paced the floor with a dull expression on his face and an inward look in his eyes. Presently he halted before Arkwood who sat silently smoking and watching him.

'If I felt sure that your conviction was correct, I should feel satisfied that you had said enough to make me find reasons for an immediate journey to Jericho—that being the limbo to which troublesome people are usually consigned. But the trip will not be necessary, for I know the lady has too much sense to care about me or to misunderstand me. And I cannot love her.'

- 'Prove it then,' said Arkwood.
- 'In any way you please.'
- 'The test is an easy one. We shall be together all the evening, we shall have no companions, and during the whole of the time you must not refer to the subject, and you must show me by your conduct that you are not thinking about it.'

'The first part of the test is easy enough; the second is somewhat difficult, for whilst my thoughts were formerly entirely of another, you have now given me cause to think about her.'

'I shall be lenient as to your thoughts, then; but I shall have no doubt as to the real state of the case if I catch you tripping in your speech. Now, then: that bargain is signed, sealed, and delivered. Let us take a walk.'



# CHAPTER VII. WILL-O'-THE-WISP



### CHAPTER VII.

### WILL-O'-THE-WISP.

Hollyford had become once more a living place in the county. Colonel Cuthbert and his daughter had settled down so rapidly in their home, that it seemed as if they had been there all their lives. He delighted in the customary occupations of an active country gentleman, and Miss Cuthbert, in spite of the frivolous disposition which she attempted to make Maurice believe to be her real one, showed in every way that she was capable of discharging the duties incumbent upon her.

She certainly did appear to be fond of gaiety, and Hollyford was earning the reputation of being one of the most hospitable of houses, one where the most pleasant people were to be met with, and therefore one of those to which it was most desirable to be invited. There was not a man, old or young, who did not speak of Miss Cuthbert as the most charming of girls; and there was not a lady who did not think the Colonel 'quite a dear,' and very far from being beyond the pale of matrimonial speculation. All the gossip about his past life, which had been awakened by his reappearance two years ago, had already sunk far below the surface of current topics. The few who remembered anything about the past only referred to it at rare intervals, when their memories were stirred by some passing word or incident. After all, our good and evil deeds are of much less permanent interest to other people than we in our vanity are apt to imagine. Of course there had been a little shyness at first on the part of some people, but curiosity is an excellent magnet, and the fine nature of the Colonel speedily overcame all doubts which might have been entertained as to the propriety of replacing his name on their visiting list.

Throughout this early period the Calthorpes were his most frequent guests, and he was more at Calthorpe than at any other house. He liked his old friend, notwithstanding his failings—better known, perhaps, to him than to anyone else; and the kindly feelings which his friend's son had awakened when he first saw him increased as their intimacy ripened. Latterly, indeed, when together, the Colonel and Maurice might have been taken for comrades of equal age.

Mr. Calthorpe was delighted; closed his eyes and smiled complacently; his plans were prospering beyond his fondest expectations, and he had nothing to do now but to leave matters to take their own course.

He was rudely startled from this state of beatitude about a week after that conversation between his son and Arkwood.

Invitations had been issued for a larger gathering than usual at Hollyford, the occasion being (although the fact was not generally known) Miss Cuthbert's birthday. But Maurice knew it, and was to have been

present. At the last moment, however, a telegram brought the intelligence that he was unexpectedly detained in London. The Colonel was much disappointed; Mr. Calthorpe was in dismay, which he endeavoured to conceal by looking very wise and nodding his head slowly, as if to suggest that he was not surprised, although he was not at liberty to enter into an explanation.

'He has a very serious affair in hand, and no doubt that is the cause of his detention. You know how very anxious he is to make way in his profession.'

He looked as if he believed it, but he was made uncomfortable by the idea which flashed upon him that Maurice had by this one act lost all the favour he had gained in Miss Cuthbert's eyes.

'How unfortunate!' she said, scarcely pausing in her conversation with Sir Frederick Powell, the young baronet of Woodstow.

The latter gentleman became a source of anxiety to Mr. Calthorpe, for he sat beside the heiress at dinner, and lingered near her in the drawing-room.

'A dangerous rival for Maurice,' Mr. Calthorpe reflected as he observed them; and she is gracious to him, certainly. A smart looking fellow, too—not much in him, but fortunate in his tailor. That's something—tailors and dressmakers have more to do with love than they get credit for. She seems to be in a particularly good humour to-night. She does not miss him. What an idiot he is not to be here!'

With all his fears that his fine-laid schemes might turn awry, he was obliged to own that Miss Cuthbert appeared to be only as happy as a girl of her years ought to be under the circumstances, and that there was no reason why there should be any shade cast upon her by the absence of one who, if he were a lover at all, was so lukewarm as to stay away on such an occasion. Still the old man's hopes, which had been so high that morning, were set down many pegs that night. He, however, possessed that in estimable blessing—perfect confidence in himself; it had carried him through so many crises, that the probabilities were in favour of its carrying him through this one, which he regarded as the greatest of them all. slept well, and it is marvellous how pale the gloomiest shadows appear after a good sleep. He made an excellent breakfast, and was glancing over the 'Times,' meditating at intervals as to the most effective mode of quickening Maurice in his love-making, when that gentleman himself appeared.

'Why did you not come last night?' he inquired casually, as if he laid no particular stress on the circumstance. 'You missed a pleasant evening, and disappointed Cuthbert.'

'He'll not be sorry when he learns that it was his business which detained me in town. We have settled that Chancery suit; his cousin withdraws, so the case is closed on the terms proposed by the Colonel.'

Mr. Calthorpe was happy again; fortune was on his side still.

- 'It really was business, then? That will be capital news for Cuthbert, for I know he had a special dread of that action, as it would have uncovered so many old scars. He missed you last night, but I suppose you would rather his daughter had done so.'
- 'She was doubtless better occupied than in thinking about me.'
- 'She was; and, if I am not mistaken, you will soon have no particular place in her thoughts at all.'
- 'I suppose you mean that she is likely to become engaged?' said Maurice thoughtfully.
- 'A girl like her is sure to have many opportunities of becoming so. Are you quite indifferent on that score?'

Maurice was silent for a moment, and although the father scanned his face eagerly, he was unable to discover any signs of anxiety.

'Not indifferent, sir; but I shall answer you more satisfactorily when I return from Hollyford. I am going there at once, to give the Colonel particulars of yesterday's proceedings, and I shall of course see Miss Cuthbert.'

'Glad to hear that; don't let me detain you. I had no idea that you were so much interested in the matter. You will find Cuthbert is your friend.'

Mr. Calthorpe was much more eager to hasten the departure of Maurice than the latter was to go. To the father this visit meant the decision of a question of vital

importance to them all; the son knew that in any case the decision could not be a satisfactory one.

The glorious sunshine was not in keeping with the curiously disturbed state of the man's mind as he rode towards Hollyford. He wished to put the nature of his relationship to Mabel Cuthbert to the test, and yet he shrank from it.

The Colonel was at home, and if Maurice had been a stranger he would have been surprised or amused, or both, when the servant informed him that he was to conduct him to 'the wilderness.' But he knew that this was the favourite retreat of the Colonel and his daughter, and proceeded thither unattended. Passing through what was a fair representation on a small scale of a

jungle, he entered a green glade, at one end of which, to gratify his daughter, Colonel Cuthbert had erected a duplicate of the bungalow he had occupied in India, with all the accessories of punkahs, lounges, and hammocks. The bungalow stood on a green terrace, and in the semicircle of shrubbery and trees which it commanded, spaces had been cut affording glimpses of varying This was what Miss Cuthbert landscapes. called her picture-gallery, and in weathers she was fond of enjoying its beauties, either alone or in the company of her father. Besides the natural pictures thus always before her, she had a large palmhouse full of tropical plants, to aid her imagination in realising what her father's home in India had been like.

Maurice passed out of the shadow of the jungle into the sunlight, which fell full upon the bungalow and the green terrace. As he approached, the Colonel was assisting Mabel out of a hammock in which she had been resting, and as he ascended the slope she was standing on the terrace, holding out her hand. In the light her fair hair shone like gold, and something in the face dazzled Maurice's eyes, as if he had been trying to look straight at the sun.

- 'Welcome, renegade!' she said merrily; 'you have been tried by court-martial, and condemned to severe punishment for your desertion last night.'
- 'I am afraid I shall be a frequent offender if the judgment of the court is to be so agreeably communicated to me. I am

the only loser by my desertion last night, and I believe the Colonel himself will act as counsel for my defence. These papers, sir, will explain my absence; and I have only to say that your cousin has given his unqualified assent to all your proposals.'

The Colonel grasped his hand warmly, and there was evidently some agitation underlying the pleasure which he experienced in receiving these tidings. There was even a slight huskiness in his voice as he spoke.

'Thank you, Maurice, most heartily. Some day, perhaps, you will learn why I have been so anxious to avoid further proceedings in this case. Enough for the present that, had my proposals been persistently refused, it would have been

necessary for Mabel's sake to have gone into matters the remembrance of which disturbed me greatly. Thank you again.'

'It was the liberality of your proposals, sir, which satisfied your cousin, and no arguments of mine.'

'You have at any rate spared me much pain. Excuse me for the present. I must go in and look at these papers.'

He turned to his daughter and kissed her tenderly on the brow—a very unusual manifestation of emotion to be made by him in the presence of a third person. Then he walked slowly away, his head slightly bowed, and a sad quietness in his movement, as if he were walking away from the grave of some one very dear to him.

Mabel watched him till he had dis-

appeared in the jungle, and then turned to Maurice with such a look on her face as he had never before observed: it was that of the subdued anxiety of earnest love—as if a soft shadow had fallen upon a clear lake that had been a moment ago all brightness.

- 'I must not ask you, Mr. Calthorpe, what is the meaning of the strange effect your news has produced upon my father. I know that he will tell me himself, if he thinks it right that I should know it.'
- 'The case was simply the question of the succession to a part of the property left him by his uncle. The matters to which he refers as sources of his agitation have not been revealed even to me. Of course, if the case had proceeded, he would have been

obliged to tell me, or whoever conducted it, and the fact that he has not to do so relieves him.'

'And it was for my sake that it would have been necessary for him to speak!' she said in a low nervous voice, thinking rather than addressing Maurice; and her eyes, still fixed upon the place where her father had disappeared, slowly filled with tears.

Maurice became pale; he stood for a moment motionless; then a strange light overspread his face; he uttered a short cry, and impulsively seized her hand.

## 'It is Lucy!'

He stood trembling with a strange awe upon him: the man's whole being was quivering with love and great joy: next moment he was like one hurled from a height and lying stunned below.

The hand did make a convulsive movement in his as he pronounced the name—he felt sure of it. And yet he knew that it must have been his own imagination which made him think so, or the effect of her natural surprise at his singular behaviour; for the eyes which had been full of tenderness and tears turned upon him so coldly that his heart was frozen, and when the hand was withdrawn from his in a quiet pitying way which conveyed the keenest reproach, 'Mr. Calthorpe!' was all she said. The voice was soft and sympathetic, as if she understood his mistake and was sorry for it.

He could not speak, and he could not

help gazing into her face, which was now so changed and still so beautiful. It was as if he had been privileged once again to see his living love, and on the instant to know it dead.

'I beg your pardon, Miss Cuthbert,' he said mechanically, pausing at each word.
'I feel as if I had been asleep and dreaming.
I scarcely know whether or not I am awake yet. I hope I have not offended you.'

There was a pathetic weariness and resignation in his voice and look: the penalty of his brief exaltation was utter prostration.

'You made a mistake, Mr. Calthorpe,' she responded kindly, 'and you startled me a little.'

'Yes, it was a mistake. Looking at you vol. 1.

now, I cannot understand it—the difference is so great. And yet you were so like her?

'And now?' she said, slowly winding her handkerchief round her finger, but still watching his face as if expecting to discover there the solution of some riddle which perplexed her.

He roused himself at the question.

- 'And now I feel how much I must bore you with this nonsense of mine.'
  - 'Do you call it nonsense?'

There was a faint movement of her lips, which might have indicated agitation, had there been any cause for it; but of course it could not be so in her case, as she was so calm and so full of pitying sympathy.

'What else?' he answered, with an

attempt at a laugh. 'I know it must appear so to you, and I do not know how you can endure my company at all.'

Miss Cuthbert dropped her handkerchief, and stooped quickly to pick it up; he stooping also, their hands touched. As they rose, he was startled again by an expression of something like pain which flashed across her face; but it was only a flash, and again he concluded that he must have been mistaken. Her conventional exclamation satisfied him.

'I am sorry to trouble you, Mr. Calthorpe.'

If there had been any emotion which she desired to conceal, it had been as transient as the expression which hinted at it; but she certainly was a shade paler than usual. He also became conventional.

'Let me bring a chair for you here in the sunshine, Miss Cuthbert. You must be fatigued after the excitement of yesterday.'

'Thank you. Not at all fatigued, although it was an evening of what is called unmitigated enjoyment, which I understand usually means an awfully dreary time. Now let us go back to what we were talking about. You must not again say that you think I think you are a bore, because that is doing yourself and me an injustice.'

'It relieves me to hear you say so; and I promise——'

'Stop. I know you are going to say that you will not make a mistake again. I take that for granted; but I do not wish you

to make up your mind not to speak to me again about a person in whom I am as much interested as my—we must really use her name; "double-goer" is such a mouthful. You just now called her——?

She waited for him to repeat the name. Even conventionality would not serve him here: he was too sensitive on the subject, and kind as Miss Cuthbert was, he could not speak of it without pain. There was, too, something in her tone and manner which made him hesitate. She helped him out of the difficulty.

## 'I think you said Lucy.'

There was not the slightest inflection of the voice: it was hard and clear; and although she was evidently interested, there was nothing in the steady eyes which were fixed upon him even to suggest the sympathy she had shown a little while ago, and which would have won the confidence she desired. She seemed to become conscious of that herself.

- 'I sometimes think, Mr. Calthorpe,' she said quietly, smiling, 'that you must have thought what I intended to be frankness at our first meeting was boldness.'
- 'Oh, no,' he said hastily, with a deprecatory movement of the hand.
- 'So much the better, for I am going to be again frank or bold, whichever you please to call it. At the first you were like an old friend to me, and now I may almost claim you as one. Is not that very bold?'
  - 'It is very pleasant.'
  - 'Please do not begin to flatter: that is

a weapon which will overcome me at once; for I don't like flattery, and I don't like the people who use it. You can try it if you want to see how shy I can be.'

The lips contracted into a pretty circle, the eyes twinkled archly, and she was like a school-girl waiting for the answer to some comical conundrum.

- 'Is not the implication flattering to me?'
- 'That depends. Tell me first, exactly what you are thinking of me at this moment, and I shall answer.'
- 'That is somewhat hard, for much of what I am thinking would sound like flattery.'
- 'Very well, then; tell me the part which won't sound like flattery.'
  - 'Then, I was thinking that you are a

will-o'-the-wisp,' he said, much amused, and falling into her humour.

- 'That certainly is not flattering; for the will-o'-the-wisp is mischievous, and misleads benighted travellers.'
- 'I meant only in your moods—you change so rapidly from grave to gay. Suppose I try another simile to express what I was thinking about you. You were like a brilliant fantasia, the theme of which I know is beautiful, but in my dulness I cannot catch it, because the variations are so rapid.'
- 'Ah! That is better, and if you will only omit the beautiful, it is very like what I appear to myself. Now I can give you your answer—it is this. I esteem you enough to wish you not to flatter

me; and if you think that I am flattering you in saying so, then you are not my friend.'

She was quite in earnest, and spoke with a matter-of-fact air, as if she would say, 'Here is the plain state of the case, and you can like it or not, as you please.' She had assumed that look and expression of self-conscious honesty which people use when they say disagreeable things under the banner of Common-sense—only, she was not saying anything disagreeable.

'We only flatter when we give our friends credit for qualities which they do not possess. I was not doing that, and now I must turn your own words against yourself, and say that you are not the friend I wish you to be if you think that there is

anything but sincere pleasure in knowing that you regard me as your friend.'

'I take it as you mean it, and we shall make this compact—that we shall never say anything to each other for the mere purpose of pleasing, but speak only what we believe to be true.'

# 'Agreed.'

- 'You understand that our compact is one of friendship,' she said, emphasising the word, and giving him her hand; 'and I hope that you will soon be able to speak quite freely to me about your friend—or I suppose I am entitled to say our friend, Lucy.'
- 'There is little more to tell you than you already know,' he answered calmly, the feeling of reserve creeping upon him again.

- 'You admired her very much?'
- 'Yes, although our acquaintance was a short one. Your singular resemblance to her frequently reminded me of her, but never so much so as to-day. The feelings which moved you when your father left us, made you—made me, in fact, forget myself.'
  - 'They were kindly feelings.'
- 'She had a kindly face, and I am sure a kindly heart.'
- 'That is as much as to say that mine is not always a kindly face. No apologies; I am pleased to find that you are so promptly obedient to the terms of our compact. I suppose I must not pry too closely into what passed between you.'
  - 'There was nothing particular passed

between us. We were good friends, that was all.'

He could not bring himself yet to 'prompt obedience' to the terms of the compact in speaking of his regard for Lucy.

'That was all!' she repeated slowly; and then, with a slight laugh, 'and I suppose, if you had not seen me, you would have entirely forgotten her by this time?'

'I must own that her image was not quite so vivid when I first met you as it is now.'

'And in time it would have passed away altogether. What a dreadful thing it would be for a woman to learn that she was forgotten by anybody she cared very much for! I wonder how she would feel—the very thought of it makes me shudder. Still

more horrible—if such a thing could be—that it was her lover who forgot her, and she should hear him say so! Happily, such a thing is impossible,' she concluded, laughing at the phantom she had herself created.

- 'Quite impossible to you, Miss Cuthbert,' he said, laughing too. She had imitated the shudder and the look of horror so naturally. 'You would make an excellent actress. Have you never thought of getting up a play at Hollyford?'
- 'Oh, yes; I am arranging one now. I shall tell you all about it another time. There is my father coming, and as he will want to speak to you about business matters, my chatter would not amuse him. Goodbye for the present.'

- 'Is it a comedy or a tragedy you have selected for the forthcoming performance?'
- 'I am not yet sure which it is to be. Have you any preference? I should like to know, because you play a leading part.'
- 'Comedy seems to me best adapted for private theatricals. The audience can then laugh at their friends with a good grace, and the actors may flatter themselves that the mirth is a tribute to their talent and not to their folly.'
- 'Perhaps it will be a comedy, then; but one never can tell what is to happen until the end is reached.'
- 'Oh, it is an original play! I had no idea that you were an author.'
- 'Well, the play is a new one, but I am only the author of a part of it. That is

why I am unable to tell you what the end of it is to be, and whether we should call it a tragedy or a comedy.'

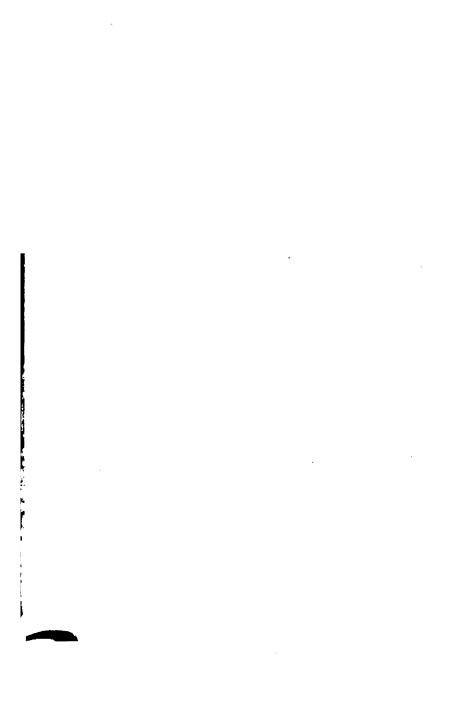
- 'Who is lucky enough to be your collaborator?'
- 'I have betrayed enough already,' she exclaimed playfully. 'It spoils one's zest in preparing a surprise when everybody knows it is coming. You must not ask me about it again until I tell you it is finished.'
- 'I shall try to curb my curiosity, but you have greatly excited it.'
  - 'Thank you.'

She walked away with a light step, exchanged a few words with her father as she passed him on the terrace, and gave one bright glance back at the bungalow before the shrubbery hid her from sight.

How independent in the manner of the party last last last all manners.

Te mu men succei mu inventiness u ne men ie iad mendel w keep essedity in mind theme this measures. One thing was there: Miss Confident was still near-five. For immediate strange power the present of causing him pleasure and pain was as inexplicable as ever except by the simple rule that he loved her. was nothing terrible in that idea, and if she had retained for ten minutes that look which had struck from him the impulsive cry 'Lucy!'—he would have known and would have told her. She was an heiress: there was nothing in that fact incompatible with love; it ought to have been an agreeable framework for a handsome woman: but in his case----

'Come, wool-gatherer! I have something to say to you,' broke in the Colonel quietly.
'I have left you five minutes in the clouds:
I want you to come back to the earth now.'



# CHAPTER VIII. SELF-TORTURE

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## CHAPTER VIII.

#### SELF-TORTURE.

### MISS CUTHBERT Wrote:

'I find it almost impossible to write about him, and yet my brain seems to be aching with the desire to tell you, Lucy, what my thoughts are about this man. I have again and again determined to do it, and have sat for hours with the pen in my hand; but the paper remained blank, and I had to rise as much exhausted in body and mind as if I had done a severe day's work. I do not know why this should be when I

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am writing to you, for I wish to tell you everything, and you understand that no thought of sparing myself would check my words; but in spite of all my efforts, the idea which I am about to set down escapes before the pen touches the paper. The very words seem to fly, leaving me powerless to tell you anything connectedly.

'To-day I feel stronger—because I am angry; and I think I can show you that the harshness with which I judged him at first was not too harsh, as I began to fear. After what he has said to-day, you cannot think that I misjudge him; after the confession I am about to make of my own feelings, you cannot think that I wish to misjudge him.

'Since my last letter, we have frequently

met. We have become what people call "great friends." I know from Mrs. Harper that there are people who think us lovers—but rumours of that kind are raised upon very slight foundations. They do no harm, apparently, for so far as I am aware they have not interfered with the attentions of other suitors. I have even had proposals, although I have done my best to prevent them, because they have been always distressing to me. I dare say that in time I shall find them amusing, as other girls do.

"But he has never done more than pay me the most ordinary compliments, although he has had opportunities such as have not been granted to anyone else to speak freely. I have tempted him to speak. To-day I had made up my mind to force from him " a

declaration;" but I shrink with a strange feeling of fright from striking that final blow, and fear I cannot do it. Then the question startles me, Do I hesitate most on account of the pain my refusal will cause him or myself? At one time it seemed that to see him overwhelmed by my contemptuous ridicule would afford me complete satisfaction for the anguish he has caused Now I am troubled about myself, and the nearer the end I have in view appears, the more I dread it. Can you understand this? It cannot be that I love him. . . . How timidly that was written, and I am still trembling as if I were sitting at the top of a hill in an east wind, instead of being in my own warm room. That is the confession I had to make to you, and it was not easily

done; for writing down this doubt of myself seems to give it probability and form. I am compelled to do it, although I know how it will sting you to think it even possible that your friend should be false to you.

'Have no fear. There can be no danger of my caring for him. I am so often angry with him, and see his weakness and selfishness so plainly. And if there had been danger, it was removed to-day when he told me calmly that you and he had been "good friends, that was all." Hearing that, and remembering how everything but words led you to believe he loved you, I felt as bitterly towards him as ever. I was almost startled into expressing it; but I carried it off so lightly, that he is still unaware how deeply I am interested on your account. He said I

was a capital actress, thinking that the horror I felt was only make-believe. He is so easily deceived, that I wonder whether he is a fool or only making a fool of me. That would be punishment indeed for the deception I am practising. I do feel mean and cruel whenever he makes me think that he is thinking of you. Should it prove that I am mistaken, that he really did care for you, and that only your absence prevented him from telling you, I could never forgive myself for what would then be heartless treachery on my part.

'Could I forgive myself if it should turn out that he really cares for me?

'I must not think of that, for the mere idea distracts me. You see how much reason I have to be troubled about myself,

and how I am haunted by doubts and fears of what I am doing. Luckily, I can easily bring myself back to common-sense. I suppose he might care for me, and had you never existed, I might have come to care for him. But I promised to show you that my first opinion of him had not been too harsh, and this should do it.

'Mrs. Harper has told me something about the Calthorpes. They have a fine place, and old Mr. Calthorpe lives and acts as if he were a millionaire. He is really in poverty, and the whole of his estates will be taken from him unless——

'I am ashamed to write the words, and yet glad to do so, because they recall my contempt—unless Mr. Maurice, as they call him, finds an heiress in time, with

money enough to save the property! That is what he is seeking, and he and his father evidently think they have found the lady in me. Everybody knows their object, and—oh, it is horribly contemptible!

'I must bring it to an end soon; the thought of it is worrying me too much. I know I shall get ill if this state of doubt continues, and then there would be no pleasure in my triumph. And yet I wish that I understood him better—I wish that I could be sure that I am not doing wrong. I see what will happen: he will tell me how desperately he loves me, how he does not care for anything in the world but me—and so on. Then I shall look pityingly at him, make a most formal bow, and say: "Really, Mr. Calthorpe, you take me by surprise. I

regret that I must decline to accept an honour so unexpected and so unmerited." Then he will plead, beg me to give him some hope (lovers always do that, I believe), and I shall become cold and haughty, repeating my refusal firmly.

'Then he will go away crestfallen, and I——'

The Colonel entered his daughter's room, and his humorous smile indicated that he had something amusing to communicate. Her back was towards him, her elbows resting on the writing-table, and her face on her hands. She did not observe his entrance.

'I am sorry to disturb you, Mabel, but I come as an ambassador. My mission is one

of the gravest importance, and—— Why, what has happened? Are you ill?'

She had risen hastily at the sound of his voice, and he saw that she had been crying.

'Yes, papa, I am ill, but it is nothing to be alarmed about,' she answered agitatedly, as she closed her writing-case. Then she wiped her eyes hastily and tried to smile. 'There, I am better now.' You must not look so serious, for it was only a silly fancy of mine, which you would laugh at, if I were to tell you what it was.'

'I would not laugh at anything which could affect you so much as this appears to have done,' he said gravely.

'But this is so foolish, I am ashamed of it.'

'Then, we need not speak of it until you

can laugh at it, not cry. Perhaps the important matter which I have to lay before you may give your thoughts a pleasanter turn. You had better sit down and prepare yourself for the awful news. Now, are you ready?'

'Oh, quite.'

His tenderness, his pleasant humour, soothed and comforted her, and she was able to smile at the mock solemnity with which he invested his subject.

'Well, then, I have a letter here from Sir Frederick Powell, and although you might not think so from my manner, the contents are of a serious nature. Can you guess what they are?'

'I have not the least idea,'

The Colonel seated himself on the couch

beside her, and the humorous expression passed from his face as he gazed earnestly into her eyes.

- 'He has reminded me, Mabel, of what I was willing to forget, that some day you will be going away from me. I have been forced to think of it sometimes, and I do not like it.'
- 'Why should I go away from you, papa?'
- 'You will marry, no doubt,' he continued softly; 'you will have new ties, new interests in life, and your father will take his place in the background of your thought and care. It is natural, and most fathers find pleasure in seeing their children well settled in life. But it is a great change under any circumstances, and you know that

I have not had time to accustom myself to the prospect of it. You are still a very young child in my eyes.'

'But it need not be,' she said, laying her head upon his shoulder, and putting her arm affectionately round his neck.

'Not immediately, I hope; but we need not shut our eyes to the probability of its coming some day. Meanwhile, I have to decide what my answer is to be to Sir Frederick, for he has asked me, with an old-fashioned formality which I like, to give him leave to pay his addresses to you. What shall I say?'

She started; there was a frightened look in her eyes, and she seemed to shiver. The Colonel was amazed.

'Tell him that he must not think of it,'
VOL. I. P

she cried excitedly. 'Tell him that he must never speak to me if he thinks of it; that I never can—that I never will—marry anybody.'

She hid her face on her father's breast and sobbed.

He remained silent for a little while, his hand smoothing her hair, his brain actively occupied with wondering and confused speculations. Then she became quiet, and he spoke in the low sad voice of one who has been suddenly made aware of a great loss which he has secretly feared, and yet had hoped to avert.

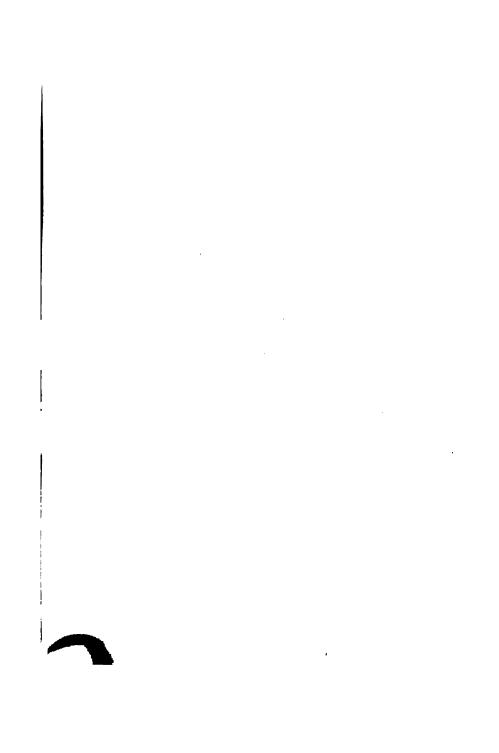
'I ought to have been prepared for this, Mabel. I ought to have been ready to learn that some one had found a way to your heart without asking my leave to pass. Well, in good time you will let me know who it is that is to take you away from me.'

- 'No one shall take me away from you,' was the passionate cry. 'I shall never marry.'
- 'You need not make rash vows, my child,' he said, patting her on the head, a kindly smile overspreading but not obscuring the father's inevitable regret. 'If you do not marry, I shall be selfishly glad; and if you do, I shall try to be unselfishly happy in seeing you happy. And I shall be, if the man happens to be to my liking. There now, we are going to have done with this subject. I know what answer to give Sir Frederick. You must take a rest, for we shall probably have both the Calthorpes with

us this evening. But if you are not well enough you need not join us.'

She was alone again; she sat with her eyes wide open, but like one in sleep, so dull and expressionless was her face.

# CHAPTER IX. OLD FOLK PROPOSE



## CHAPTER IX.

#### OLD FOLK PROPOSE.

- 'You are not in such good spirits as I expected to find you to-night, Cuthbert,' said Mr. Calthorpe, passing the wine. 'I thought that with the quiet settlement of this disagreeable business you would have rejoiced in the feeling of freedom from all anxiety as to the past.'
- 'Have I been dull, then?' asked the Colonel. 'I did not mean to be so, and I thought we were particularly merry during dinner.'

- 'Miss Cuthbert was, but you were not.'
- 'I was thinking about her—she is not well.'
- 'Not well! I never saw her looking better, and I cannot imagine how she could be in brighter spirits than she was to-night. All your thoughts about her should be pleasant ones. I regard her as the best part of the good fortune which has come to solace you for the troubles of the old time. Upon my word, Cuthbert, I think you are an exceptionally lucky fellow.'
- 'Yes, I am a lucky fellow,' responded the Colonel meditatively, gazing out into the soft twilight, for the lamps had not yet been lighted and the curtains were not drawn.
  - 'Think what you have found,' continued

Mr. Calthorpe, who was in the most complacent mood, evidently pleased with himself and with everybody else. 'She is handsome, she is remarkably clever, and she is devoted to you.'

- 'Ay, I am sure of that. No father ever had a more loving child. It is because I prize her so much that I dread everything which might cause her the least unhappiness.'
- You say that as sadly as if you knew of something which was likely to do it. Is there anything?'

Two figures crossed the lawn, and as his eyes rested upon them the Colonel smiled. Then he rose and went to the window, to get another glimpse of his daughter and Maurice.

- 'I told you she is not well,' he said, turning to his friend, 'and to-day I have become satisfied that it is not mere fancy on my part. I have watched her closely during the last two years, and although she has shown herself most eager to do everything that would make me happy, and has appeared to be happy and contented herself, there have been times when the idea has been forced upon me that there is something on her mind about which she will not speak to me.'
  - 'Have you told her so?'
- 'Not yet,' he replied, as if speaking to himself whilst he slowly paced the floor, head bowed and hands clasped behind him. 'What occurred to me is this: that in striving to do what I believe to be best for

her, I have done her an injury in making the change in her life so sudden and complete.'

- 'The change was necessary, and you have not deprived her of any friends.'
- 'No, I have not deprived her of her friends, but I have separated her from them.'
- 'But only for a time, and she knows that you would not put any needless restriction upon her seeing them.'
- 'Yes, any of the friends I know; but there may be somebody about whom I know nothing yet, and whose introduction she may fear would not be pleasing to me. Do you understand?'

Mr. Calthorpe did understand, and was startled into a new train of reflection.

Deeply as he had considered the probabilities of the young heiress being speedily captured by some knight of more daring heart than his son, it had never before occurred to him that she might be already a captive. Now that the idea was suggested, it appeared to him only too probable: it would account, as nothing else in her early training would, for the ease with which she bore and repelled the assaults of many wooers.

- 'What has made you think of this?'
- 'Her vehemence in assuring me to-day that she would never marry: her strange fits of depression, followed by wild moods of excitement, such as she was in this evening. You thought her mirth was the natural result of good health and an easy mind. To me it was all forced—so plainly

forced, that I am surprised you did not observe it.'

- 'I thought we formed a very pleasant family party, and was delighted with her humorous way of challenging Maurice to dare the evening dews by accompanying her to the bungalow in search of something she had left there. I cannot imagine what reason she could have for attempting to deceive you regarding her state of health or mind.'
- 'Because you do not feel as I do what you said yourself just now—that she is devoted to me. She is so glad to be with me, she thinks that I have done so much for her, and that there has been so much sorrow in my life already, that she must sacrifice every inclination of her own if

it should cause me the least uneasiness. Poor child, it was her mother's way, and unfortunately I did not understand it until too late.'

'But you may be mistaken,' suggested Mr. Calthorpe feebly, for he could not find much assurance in the suggestion himself.

'Possibly—I hope so; but I am disturbed by old memories. Every look and every laugh or smile makes me think of her mother on the last day we were together. She was like what Mabel was to-night, perfectly free from care apparently. I was blindly happy, and had no suspicion that she was making it a merry day because it was to be our last one together. So it proved; but if she had lived! Well, there is no use

speculating upon what might have been, except when it helps us to direct what may be.'

'If it should happen that your surmise is correct, and that Mabel has a lover of whom she thinks you would not approve—what will you do?'

Mr. Calthorpe put the question cautiously; but notwithstanding his own selfish interest in the answer, there was a kindly elèment of interest on his friend's account also.

- 'Try to find out what the man was, and, if he were an honest fellow, give her to him with my blessing.'
- 'What! without consideration as to his position—education—prospects!'
  - 'Without considering anything beyond

the question whether or not he would make her happy.'

'But, my dear Cuthbert, this would not be just even to her. She does not——'

'There!' interrupted the Colonel, smiling at his friend's look of astonishment and alarm; 'I know all the wise counsel you would give me, and thank you for it the more heartily that it is still unspoken. I shall use all necessary prudence to secure my object—that is, I shall be careful that she does not fall into the hands of a scamp. But I must not forget that before my return to England she had time to form ties which may be more tender even than those which bind her to me. I own a weak sense of regret in thinking that it can be so, but I must teach myself to think of it as one of the

unavoidable results of the unfortunate events which kept us so long apart, and to become resigned to it. I should like to hold the first place in her heart, but that is impossible.'

- 'Still, her duty to you will enable her to feel that whatever you decide is for her benefit.'
- 'I shall accept nothing from her sense of duty.' This was said very quietly, but very firmly. The man seemed to be calmly recognising the inevitable fact that there was something he longed for and could never hope to possess. 'What I may request her to do she must consent to do because she sees herself it is right for herself, and not because it is my wish and her duty to obey. She is a curious girl, and not one to be read at a glance. On the score of duty she

would do anything, however distasteful; to give me pleasure she would submit to any martyrdom, and try to look cheerful under it. That is why I hesitate to press her for an explanation. Perhaps it is wrong: we often cause pain to others in our anxiety to spare them.'

- 'The matter is of such a serious nature that the sooner you speak the better.'
- 'I am not sure of that: time and separation settle these affairs without assistance. If she stands that test, I shall know it is her fate that claims her, and act accordingly.'

He looked again from the window. The trees were fusing into black masses against the deepening sky, and the stars were becoming prominent.

- 'Have you never formed any project of your own as to her future?'
- 'Of course, several projects; and one of them was recalled to me a few minutes ago when I saw her passing with Maurice. I should have been well pleased if he had won her.'
- 'I have thought of that too,' ejaculated Mr. Calthorpe warmly. Then, checking his enthusiasm, and assuming the air of a man who, whilst condescending to make a trifling admission of weakness, is sustained by the consciousness that his motives are above suspicion—'You are of course well acquainted with his circumstances; but he has talents, and I believe will make a place for himself in the world.'
  - 'I have considered all that, and so have

you, Calthorpe—as was natural in us both, seeing them so much together. I like Maurice, and sometimes I have thought that she also had a particular regard for him.'

- 'She shows him some favour, I think; and I have frequently meditated having a chat with you on the subject. But it always seemed to me best not to interfere. Knowing your penetration, I had no doubt that you would not permit matters to go too far if the probable result should be distasteful to you.'
- 'You now know that it would be the opposite. However, there is little hope of its coming about.'
- 'I would not give up hope until she confesses that she has some other attachment; and you can discover that without disturbing

OLD FOLK PROPOSE.

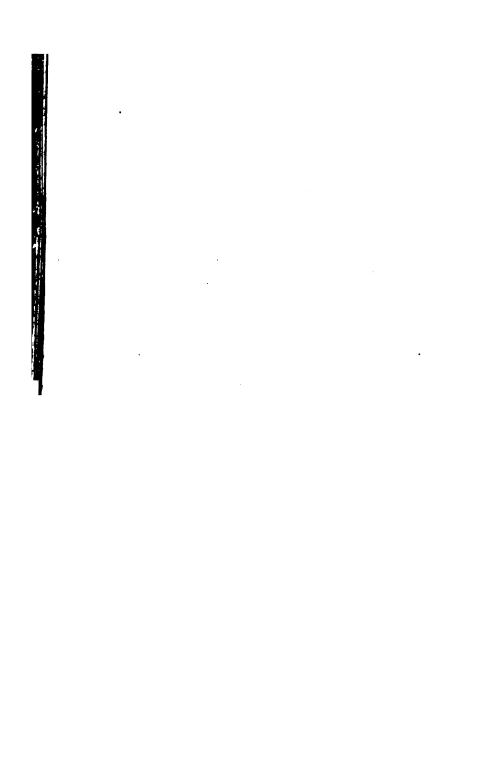
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her much. I need not say how gratifying it would be to me if Hollyford and Calthorpe were united; and since we are agreed, I see no reason why they should not be.'

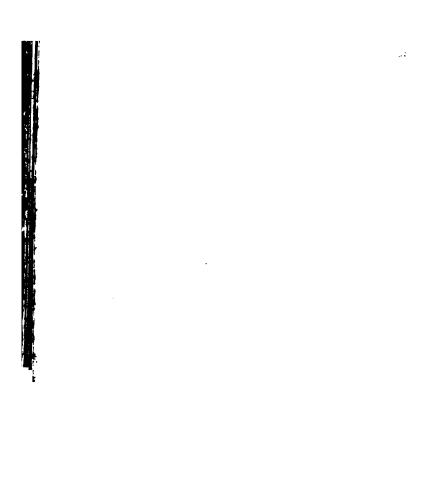
'I sincerely wish they could agree to join hands,' said the Colonel earnestly. Mr. Calthorpe was determined that they should agree.

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